

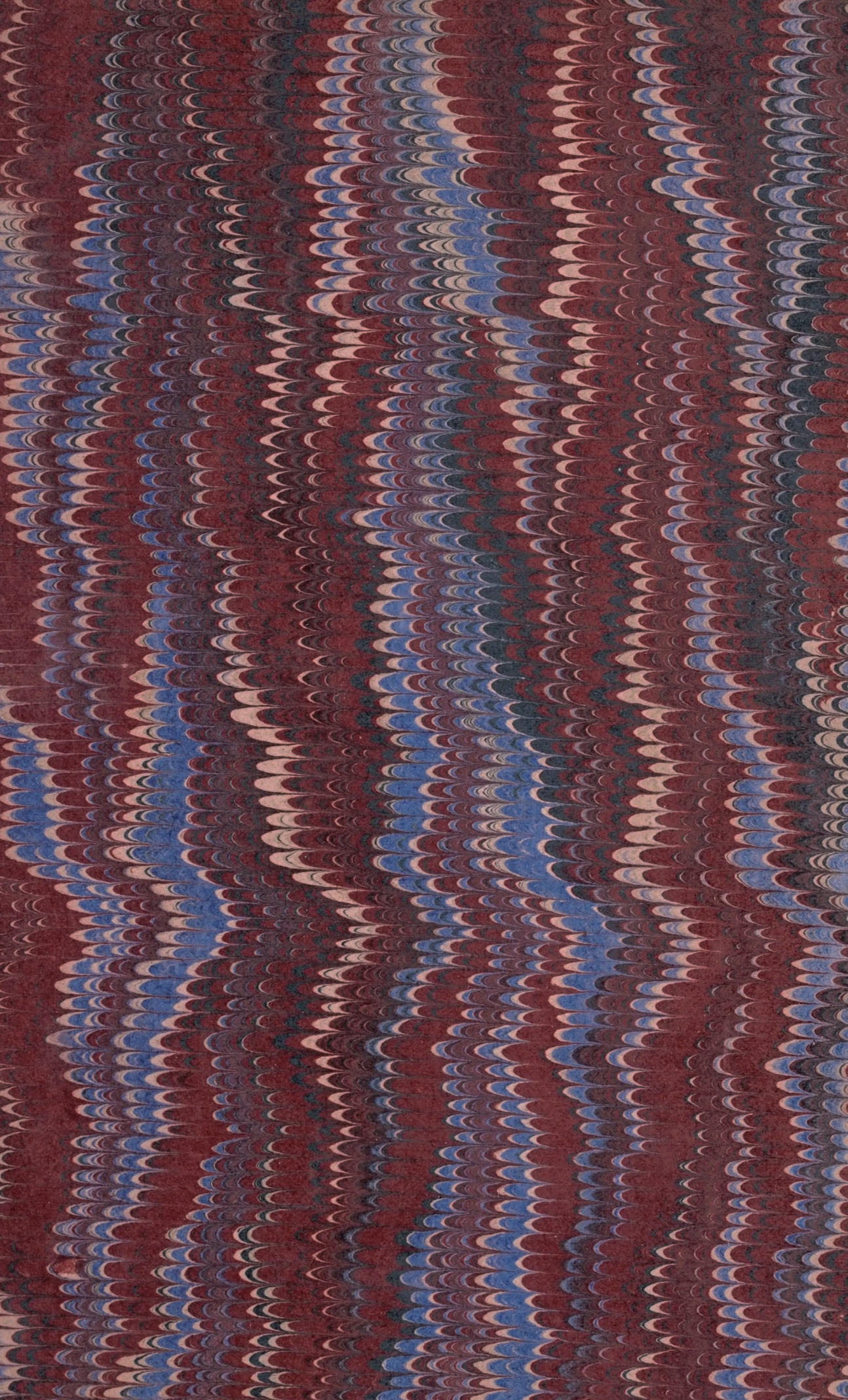
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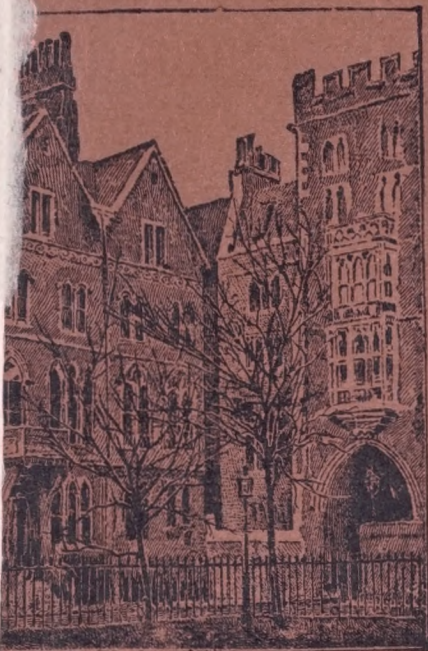
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BY
B. L. FARJEON

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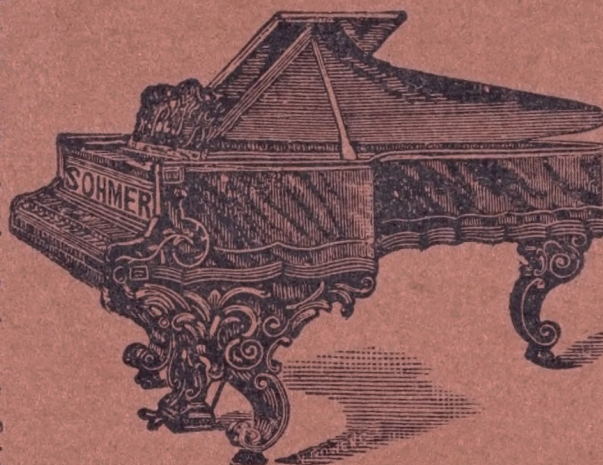
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MERRY, MERRY BOYS

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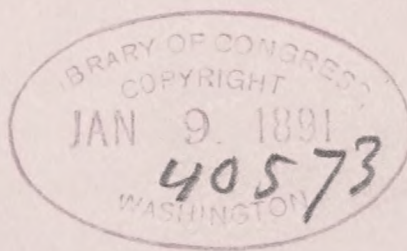
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edition of my story published
in the United States with my
sanction, and the only one to
which I expect to refer.

O. L. Fairbank

MERRY, MERRY BOYS

✓ BY
B. L. FARJEON

Authorized Edition



NEW YORK
UNITED STATES BOOK COMPANY
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1890

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MERRY, MERRY BOYS.

CHAPTER I.

GRANDMAMA LONGMORE'S PECULIAR WAYS, AND A LITTLE
GOSSIP ABOUT MYSELF.

UP to a certain time in their lives they were never tired of speaking of the days when they were boys together, and when we were all together of an evening, it was delightful to hear them break out into the song,

“When we were boys,
Jolly, jolly boys,
When we were boys together.”

Grandmama Longmore would join in, and insist upon being one of the Boys, who were so bound up in each other that it seemed impossible that anything in the world—any change in their circumstances, such as one growing rich and the other growing poor—could part them. Always, in my remembrance, from the first day on which I saw her, during the many, many years that I was with her and them, did Grandmamma Longmore's voice shake and pipe, her head, which I used to think

must be set on springs, shaking sympathetically as she spoke or laughed, or sang. She had an extraordinary opinion of her vocal powers, which opinion, from courtesy and out of deference to her age, we never disputed, but the truth of the matter is, it was not possible for her to sing in tune; and the two firm friends, Benjamin Longmore, her son, and Philip Ollier, no relation at all, would bear with her awhile, and then burst out laughing; whereat Grandmamma Longmore, quite unconscious of the cause of their merriment, would pause a moment, and then join them in laughing as she had joined them in singing. She was a very old, old lady, and neither the printer nor the reader is to suppose I have made a mistake in using the word "old" twice. When she first took up her residence in her son's house her appearance was ancient and faded in the extreme, and so it remained for the sixteen years during which we were together; her exact age I cannot state, but any stranger would have guessed it at between eighty and a hundred. A mysterious old lady was she in her whims and ways, and, although exhibiting no signs of mental decay, one who had to be carefully looked after. Her favorite proverb, which she was never tired of dinning into the ears of her young auditors, was the old-fashioned "Early to bed, And early to rise, Makes a man healthy, Wealthy, and wise." Healthy she certainly was, but certainly not wealthy; nor was she accounted wise in Benjamin Longmore's house. She practiced what she preached. Unless there was something stirring she wished to pry into, when she would grimly and patiently sit us all out, she went to bed early, and rose early in the morning, making her appearance regularly at the breakfast table; but if we left her there when the meal was

over, and returned to the room a few minutes afterwards, we invariably found the sugar basin empty. It was useless to ask her where it had gone to. She would look at us innocently, and exclaim, "The idea of asking me such a question ! You must be growing childish." If Benjamin Longmore were aware of this comical disappearance he would say jocularly, "O, mother's got a sweet tooth ;" but we could not accept this explanation, for her teeth were few and far between, and it was not possible that she could have devoured so large a quantity of sugar in so short a time. She had her own private room in the house, which was cleaned every day under her personal superintendence, and the key of which, attached by a string to some part of her person, she kept in her pocket. None of us dared to enter this apartment without invitation. Occasionally she would take one of us into her sanctum, and after locking the door and going through a performance bearing a mild resemblance to the villain in a melodrama when he is about to commit a dreadful deed, would draw from two antiquated hair-covered trunks a number of packets which she placed in rows on the table, and say :

"My dear, when I am gone all these are yours. I have left them to you in my will. Don't whisper it to a soul in the house."

She never opened the packets, and we were therefore left in a state of tantalizing anxiety as to the nature of the inheritance she thus bequeathed to us ; but it subsequently transpired that she was in the habit of making this statement to every person in the establishment, and that she only went through the form when she desired a favor or an obligation from the particular person

with whom she was closeted. There were other things missing besides sugar, some of which, when we got used to her, we succeeded in recovering, and if we did not make a fuss, it was because the missing articles were generally of little value. That I may not convey a wrong impression of Grandmamma Longmore I must say at once that, with the exception of these peccadilloes and of certain small, artful and mysterious ways, excusable in a person of her age, she was by no means objectionable. One of her pleasantest characteristics was the delight she took in her grandchild Grace and Grace's boy lover Edward Ollier. Benjamin Longmore and Philip Ollier were both widowers, each left with one child, and the affection which existed between them was transmitted to their children, who, with the amused consent of their parents, entered into a matrimonial engagement very early in life, before they got into their teens indeed. But this is running ahead of matters, and I had best explain how it came about that I held an honored and responsible position in Benjamin Longmore's family.

As it is not my own history I am relating I shall be brief as respects myself. Blessed with good parents, who gave me an excellent education, I found myself an orphan at a critical period in a young girl's life. My father died when I was sixteen years of age, and I followed my mother to the grave a year afterwards. I remember vividly how those about me sought to dissuade me from paying this last tribute of love to one I idolized and who idolized me, their argument being that it was not usual for a lady of my standing to follow the remains of any one dear to her, that duty being left to the male representatives of the family. I

did not understand this at the time, and I do not understand it now. It was not for the reason that there were no immediate male relations of my dear mother to pay this final tribute to her memory that I disregarded the counsels of my friends ; had there been many I should have insisted upon my right to drop a few loose flowers into her grave. Then, as regards my social position, my friends, of course, believed that property had fallen to me upon the death of my parents. I alone knew that they were mistaken, for I had learned that I was thrown upon the world absolutely without means, and that I had to depend upon my own exertions for subsistence. When my friends learned this they fell off from me, and took but little interest in my welfare. I do not reproach them, for I know it is common and the way of the world.

Casting about for the best and most likely means of earning a livelihood, I bethought myself of an aunt who, during the early days of my childhood, had professed to love me. She was my godmother, and I was named after her—a somewhat stately name for an ordinary English girl, Felicia. My parents, however, or one of them, had in some way offended this lady, and she had withdrawn her favor from them and me. But now, being alone in the world, I wrote to her, and informing her of my sad bereavement and helpless position, asked her to help me. She wrote back at once, saying she was not rich, but that she would be willing to receive me in her home as a companion. I gladly accepted the offer, and went to her, and lived with her for eighteen years, at the end of which I was still single, and somewhat too far advanced in life to hope to be anything else. “You will die an old maid,”

my aunt used to say to me, and as I am considerably older now than I was then, there is not the least doubt that she uttered a true prophecy. I had my girl dreams, but they faded away, and I am thankful to say have left no bitterness behind them.

When I joined my aunt no allusion was made to any allowance for my services, and I make mention of this to prove how unworldly I was, for it was no idle life I led in her house. I was not only her companion, but her housekeeper and nurse, and I had a fair right to expect that some small provision would be made for me. But for the second time I found myself, at my aunt's death, thrown upon the world without resources. The lady I had served was not entirely to blame. Years before I entered her house she had invested her small fortune in a life annuity, and she had no money to leave to me or to anyone. Her wardrobe was bequeathed to me, and I was thankful for the legacy. It was a good wardrobe, and to this day her dresses are useful to me; and a few odd pieces of lace she used to wear on state occasions enable me appear as a lady. During the years I was with her I learned a great deal; I had no dressmakers' bills to pay, for I made my own dresses, and am rather vain of my accomplishments in the way of cutting and altering and turning—in other words, in trimming old lamps till they look like new. If I had daughters of my own I should be most careful to instruct them in this art, and I have no doubt they would live to appreciate it at its proper worth.

While living with my aunt I learned other lessons than how to cut and snip; among them the lesson of patience and toleration, upon which too high a value cannot be set. My parents had left me no worldly

possessions, but they had transmitted to me an equable disposition which would have served me in good stead in any circumstances in life. This was the groundwork of qualities of temper and judgment which saved me from many miseries, especially from that unhappy inclination, with which numbers of mortals are endowed, of going forward to meet troubles half way. I do not say this in praise of myself; I state it merely as an explanation of my good fortune in obtaining the good will and confidence of those upon whom I have been to a great extent dependent. From the time I was thrown penniless upon the world to the present day I have lived in two homes only—in that of my aunt, and afterwards in the home of Benjamin Longmore. Thus I have been spared the vicissitudes with which most others in my position have been afflicted, and I ascribe it chiefly to my inheritance of mental and moral qualities, by the unconscious exercise of which I have gained affection which has sweetened my days. My aunt had what is generally described as a “trying” temper, but though in early years she caused me to shed many secret tears I never had a difficulty with her, and we lived together in peace and harmony.

“Felicia,” she said on her deathbed, “I have not behaved justly towards you, and it is too late now to repair my error. Think kindly of me when I am gone, and do not worry about your future. Things are sure to come right.”

She was as correct in this prognostication as she was in the prophecy that I shall die an old maid.

CHAPTER II.

I ENTER THE SERVICE OF BENJAMIN LONGMORE.

WELL, there I was, thirty-four years of age, homeless for the second time in my life, and on the look-out for a situation. I was as fortunate then as I have always been. Seeing an advertisement in a newspaper of good repute for a companion to a young mother in a delicate state of health, I replied to it, and was invited to call upon Mr. Longmore, in the north of London. There was a hint in the advertisement that the applicant must be competent to perform certain responsible duties in the direction of a small household. There was nothing in the management of a house for which I did not consider myself fully competent, and without any fears upon this head I obeyed Mr. Longmore's summons. He was a pleasant-mannered gentleman, and he informed me that a great number of letters had been sent in answer to his advertisement—which I could well believe, knowing how overcrowded are the ranks in all occupations—and that his wife had selected my application as the one which most recommended itself to her. I saw that he was in some anxiety concerning his wife, and that he intended to exercise scrupulous care in his choice of a companion for her.

“Be kind enough,” he said, “to tell me all about yourself.”

I gave him a faithful description of my career and circumstances, and he observed that it was unjust on the part of my aunt to leave me entirely without resources after so long a service.

"I make no complaint against her," I said. "She offered me a home when I had none, and I was happy with her."

"You had a claim upon her."

"Scarcely more than a sentimental claim. Had she lived, and wished to pay me a salary, she would have had to deprive herself of luxuries to which she was accustomed. I do not think I should have consented to that."

"You were not very worldly," said Mr. Longmore, looking at me attentively, "but have grown wiser, no doubt."

"I am not extravagant in my expectations," I replied with a smile, his meaning was so clear.

"We are not rich people," he said. "The question is whether you would be satisfied with our home, in which we have to be economical, and with the modest salary I can afford to offer you."

"I think I should be quite satisfied," I said. "The question rather is whether I should suit you and your wife, and that can only be answered by giving me a trial."

"You see," he said, "what I require in the house is a practical person, and your indifference to your own interests is not a good guarantee."

"Perhaps," I said, with an inward compliment to myself for my shrewdness, "I can look after the interests of others better than I can my own." A remark which seemed to give him a better opinion of my abilities.

“Go and talk to my wife,” he said. “I desired to see you first, honestly to be able to approve of you. If you please her we will speak of terms. Though the mischief is,” he added, “that her eyes are in her heart, while mine are in my head.”

He took me himself to his wife’s room, and I made the acquaintance of a lady whose sweetness and gentleness were like stars of peace and love in the home blessed by her presence. She was fragile and delicate—I saw that at a glance—and on her lap lay an infant, one year and one day old, as the fond mother informed me. This child was my dear Grace, who was as happy in her inheritance of moral and mental qualities as I was myself; but her character will unfold itself as my story progresses. Only one thing must be mentioned. Her virtues sprang from her mother, in whose nature there was no hidden mystery which, under the stress of evil circumstance, would have laid bare to the eyes of the world vices which slept when temptation was far away. Mrs. Longmore’s soul was the incarnation of purity and sinlessness, as white and unstained as falling snow.

The moment I saw Mrs. Longmore, my heart went out to her, and that hers beat responsively to mine I soon had proof. Our first interview was not a long one; she was not strong, and after some necessary questions had been asked and answered I rose to take my leave. I had already made friends with baby, and though I saw I had produced a good impression I began to fear—so earnest was my desire to enter this happy home—that Mr. Longmore’s verdict might be against me. Mrs. Longmore had risen from the sofa to receive me, and before I went from the room I

assisted her on to it again, and put baby in a low swinging cradle on a level with the loving mother's face as she lay down.

"It is all arranged, then," said Mrs. Longmore, with anxiety no less than my own.

I looked at Mr. Longmore, and he asked me to return to the room I had left, where he would presently join me. I closed the door softly after me, and as I caught a glimpse of him bending tenderly over his wife, I knew that my fate was being discussed.

I had not long to wait for the verdict. Mr. Longmore came in and said that his wife wished that I should be engaged; I replied that I was very glad, and inquired when I should come.

"We have to settle about terms," he remarked. "What are your views as to salary?"

I named a sum per annum which he said was ridiculously low, but so apprehensive was I that there should be no obstacle on my part to the engagement, that I insisted it would be sufficient.

"Very well," he said, "let it be as you suggest. We can come to a more equitable arrangement when we discover whether we suit each other."

On the following day I entered his service, and his home has been mine ever since. It was a happy home, saddened though it was by a grievous and irreparable loss which fell upon it when Grace was four years old. The duties devolving upon me I carried out almost from the first week of my arrival. Mrs. Longmore required not only a companion for herself and child, but a housekeeper as well, and I was soon in possession of all the keys. The family grew to depend upon me and to love me, and I grew to love them as truly as if they

had been of my blood. Ah, how it grieved me to observe that my dear mistress was gradually but surely wasting away! As week after week passed by her face became more delicate, her hands and fingers more transparent. She used to amuse her child by placing her hand before the candle and letting the light shine through it. Grace was too young to comprehend the significance of this pathetic pastime, too young to guess that the dear mother was travelling steadily on to the valley and the shadow of death. Mrs. Longmore never murmured or repined, and of all those around her I think I was the only one who truly realized what was coming. Philip Ollier, already a widower, and his little boy Ned lived very near and visited us regularly, and Mrs. Longmore would lie back in her easy-chair, and contemplate the picture of the two children sitting close together, looking over a picture book or playing with their toys.

"I wonder whether it will ever be," she whispered to me.

I glanced at the children, and then at Mrs. Longmore.

"Poor Ned is without a mother," she said, still in a whisper, "and my darling Grace soon will be."

She caught my hand, and pressed it convulsively.

"Hush, hush!" I murmured, and I passed my hand across her forehead, smoothing her hair away, and calming her as best I could. This action of mine invariably had a soothing effect upon her.

That night when Grace was asleep and her mother and I were alone, Mrs. Longmore said:

"I have been trying to dream for weeks and weeks past of the future. Before going to sleep I have said to myself a hundred times, 'My dear child's future—what will it be, what will it be? Let me see it in my

dreams.' But I have never once dreamt of her. Is it not strange?"

"Dreams have ever been a mystery to me," I said; "how they come and go, and whether there is any real meaning in them. But, dear Mrs. Longmore, you should not excite yourself; it is not good for you."

"Miss Felicia," she said—it was in those terms all in the house addressed me—"nothing can alter what will be, what must be; nothing can retard it, nothing can hasten it. Open my desk—thank you. You will see under the papers there two sealed letters, without any address on them; they are in pink envelopes. Yes, those are they. Bring them here, and open the smaller one, please."

I did as she directed, and drew forth a sheet of paper, on the inner page of which was written, "I shall die the first week in September," in her own handwriting. It was her death sentence, pronounced by herself. My heart chilled as I gazed upon the ominous words, but my dear mistress was quite calm. Recovering myself I ventured to ask whether she was wise in giving way to such fancies. With a smile, sad and sweet, she shook her head.

"They are not fancies, Miss Felicia. There exists within me certain convictions, the fulfilment of which are fixed and unalterable. I can measure the time allotted to me, and I know that I shall die at the time I have set down. In September my darling will be motherless."

"I am sure, I am sure," I urged, "that it is not good to dwell upon such matters, and to make up one's mind to what will transpire in the future. We are all in the hands of a merciful Judge who knows best what is best for us."

"I bow my head to Him," she said reverently folding her hands, "and it is in submission, not in rebellion, that I have written those words. Miss Felicia, I wrote them for your eyes alone to see. I would not grieve my dear husband by showing them to him. Destroy the paper, and dip the pen in the ink for me."

I gave her the pen, and she wrote my name on the envelope that remained.

"You will not open it," she said, "till I am gone. Miss Felicia, heaven sent you to my house; you are my solace, my comforter. I am humbly grateful."

"You overrate my services," I said. "I love you most truly."

"Love my child," she said earnestly.

"I do, with my whole heart and soul."

"Love her always; never desert her. She may need by her side when she is a woman one as wise and tender as yourself. I have the fullest faith in you; I know you to be good and right-minded. I look forward to what is coming with resignation, because I feel that you will take my place with my dear, and be to her what I should have been if my life were spared."

I was inexpressibly affected by this sacred mark of confidence, and, in words as forcible as I could command, I assured her that I would prove worthy of it. When we were both calmer she said:

"Miss Felicia, had you your choice, would you rather be rich or poor—for happiness, I mean?"

I replied, speaking not for myself alone but in a general way, that we could be happy in either condition, and that our aim should be to make the best use of the means at our command, whether they were large or small.

"But how seldom that is done," she observed. "Great good fortune is hard to bear; it changes our natures sometimes—too often, I am afraid. Those pleasures are not the sweetest which are the easiest gained. Money, which should be our servant, becomes our master, and the power it bestows frequently turns good into evil. It may sound strange, but as we pray to be delivered from temptation, so, if there were many years of life before me, I should pray to be delivered from the burden of great wealth."

Although I dimly recognized the force of her utterances, it was not until long after she was laid to rest that I fully realized their application to those whom she held most dear.

CHAPTER III.

BENJAMIN LONGMORE AND PHILIP OLLIER EXPRESS THEIR
VIEWS ON THE SUBJECT OF MONEY.

THE conversation I have recorded took place in the month of June. The summer of that year was a delightful season, and the fine weather seemed to have a wonderful effect upon Mrs. Longmore's health. There was a tender gayety in her spirits which spread through the whole house like sunshine.

"She is growing stronger," said Mr. Longmore, in a happy voice. "She will be her old self again presently."

He was tenderly attached to his wife, and was unremitting in his attentions and in his care for her; so far as his means would allow he surrounded her with everything that could make life pleasant and enjoyable, and it was not in her nature to sadden these evidences of love by one word of repining. She had a great admiration for her husband's friend, Philip Ollier, and spoke to me of his character in the highest terms.

"There, at least," she said, "is a man whom riches would not spoil. He would know how to use them to a good end; I hope Ned will take after him."

"There is no reason why he should not," I said. "Mr. Ollier says he is going to educate his son himself, and the little fellow's ways already comically resemble those of his father."

We had both noted this with amusement. Philip Ollier had a trick of walking up and down with his hands clasped behind him when he was debating any important matter, and Ned, when any small matter was in his mind, unconsciously fell into the same habit; and it used to bring a smile to my lips, and some wonder also to my mind, when I saw in the lad these reproductions of his father's peculiarities. I, too, in common with my dear mistress, had a high opinion of Philip Ollier, whose views were in singular accord with hers, but I remember that it once struck me as strange that in her confidential conversations with me she never alluded to her husband in the same association. She spoke of him always with exceeding tenderness, but yet occasionally with a note of pity, as though she believed it was almost a vital point that he should be ever within the reach of some purifying influence to which he would bow and by which he could be persuaded to be directed. After this thought occurred to me I revolved the subject in my mind, and studied the opinions and views of the two friends with more care than I had hitherto given to them; and upon a certain occasion, when Mrs. Longmore was not present, the opportunity of some enlightenment was afforded to me.

"I heard of an old friend to-day," said Philip Ollier, mentioning the name of the friend, which I cannot recall; it is of no importance, not being necessary to my story, so I will call him Jones.

"Indeed," said Benjamin Longmore. "Jones, who was at school with us, you mean."

"The same. That fair-haired, thick-lipped boy, who spoke with a lisp, and used to get flogged about twice a-week."

"I haven't given him a thought for years," observed Benjamin Longmore. "He was not the kind of school-fellow that lives in one's memory. His father was a pawnbroker, wasn't he?"

"Yes, Ben," replied Philip Ollier, "and we decided it was just the kind of business that Jones was cut out for, and that he hadn't a soul above buttons. Of all the boys in our acquaintance he was the one who was the least likely to do anything remarkable. We were mistaken. He has done something very remarkable."

"You surprise me. What is it?"

"He has made a great fortune."

"Made it?" exclaimed Benjamin Longmore.

"Made it," said Philip Ollier.

"By himself? Out of his own head?"

"Out of his own head—a shrewder head than we supposed it to be."

"How did he make it?" asked Benjamin Longmore, and an unusual excitement in his voice caused me to raise my eyes to his face.

"By speculation. He has actually been promoting companies; got hold of a mine somewhere in the Polar regions, and swept into his purse no end of money—thousands, hundreds of thousands. He has bought a famous estate—not in the Polar regions—and talks of entering parliament."

"He will be a credit to the House. How in the world did he manage it?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, except, as I have said, that he is cleverer than we gave him credit for being."

Benjamin Longmore drummed on the table with his fingers, and there were puckers in his face.

"Look here, Phil," he said, "Jones was a dunce and a fool at school."

"He was. The biggest dunce and the biggest fool of the lot."

"It hardly seems fair, does it?"

"I don't catch your meaning."

"Why, that this addlepate should become suddenly so rich, while we—"

"Well, Ben," said Philip Ollier, prompting the conclusion of the sentence. "While we?—"

"Are as we are."

"Very cozy and comfortable, I think," said Philip Ollier, looking around the room.

"You don't care for money, Phil."

"Don't I?" retorted Philip Ollier. "I wish I had more than I could carry."

"And yet you don't envy Jones."

"Not a bit. He is quite welcome to his luck, so far as I am concerned. As long as a man is comfortable and has enough, he wants little more, in my opinion."

"He does want more," said Benjamin Longmore, speaking slowly, "he wants money. It is the greatest power in the world; it can accomplish everything. With it a man is a prince, a king; without it, he is a dummy."

"Seriously, now, Ben," said Philip Ollier, "would you like to be a king?"

"Would I like it? Show me the man who wouldn't."

"Look at me, then. If the burden had been thrown on my shoulders as a birthright I should have had to bear it, but to have the choice, and not run away from it—no, no, Ben, I happen to know when I'm well off. No crown for Philip Ollier, thank you."

"Where's your common sense?" asked Benjamin Longmore. "Who are the men who hold places in the

world, who are bowed down to and looked up to, and talked about, who have power? The men who have money; all the others are drudges, or puppets, or slaves."

"Take the whole of the responsibility, Ben; upon present evidence I will have none of it."

"That's not like you, Phil—to shirk an argument."

"I don't shirk it; I have simply come to some sort of conclusion upon certain matters and entertain opinions respecting them, which are, of course, subject to correction. Of all the birds in the air is the eagle the most to be envied? There's many a small bird I think I had rather be. You can carry on the simile, Ben, to the seas and the forests."

"I have also," said Benjamin Longmore, "come to some sort of conclusion upon certain matters, and entertain opinions respecting them——"

"Which," interrupted Philip Ollier, laughing, "are, like my own, open to correction, I hope."

"I don't know about that. One day I intend to be fabulously rich. I want to know how it feels."

"All right," said Philip Ollier, "when that day comes tell me how you feel, and I'll see whether it's worth while."

I listened in amazement and sorrow to Benjamin Longmore's views. Had they been expressed in his usual manner they might not have so deeply impressed me, but I had never heard him speak with such intense feeling as on this occasion. Moreover, the discussion in which he was engaged seemed to change his character. His face, generally so pleasant, became crafty, and there was a cunning, greedy look in his eyes it pained me to see. I was glad my dear mistress was

not present to see it and to hear what he said. I thought of her words :

“Great good fortune is hard to bear ; it changes our natures sometimes—too often, I am afraid.”

And again :

“Money, which should be our servant, becomes our master, and the power it bestows frequently turns good into evil.”

Were these remarks made with special reference to one who was dear to her, or did they spring merely from her observation of the general affairs of life ? Did she fear that there lurked in her husband's nature a spirit of evil which some malignant influence might cause to leap into existence ? I had had already some experience of Benjamin Longmore, and it was entirely in his favor. He was courteous, kind, and considerate, and he had a profound love for his wife and child ; but if he were tried in the fire of great prosperity how would it be with him ? In the midst of these anxious musings I looked up and saw him as I had been in the habit of seeing him, pleasant-mannered, and with an agreeable expression on his face. He and his friend were speaking upon another subject, and I detected no discordant note in their voices. Presently they joined in a hearty laugh which rang like music through the room. I was greatly relieved, and I inwardly reproached myself for the silent injustice I had done my master.

“Do not be so hasty in your judgments, Felicia,” I said to myself.

CHAPTER IV.

MON REPOS.

ON a fine day in July my mistress and I, accompanied by Benjamin Longmore and Philip Ollier, took a drive in the country, Barnet way, in accordance with the advice of the doctor, who wished Mrs. Longmore to have the benefit of the soft warm air when the weather was entirely favorable. At that period the country through which we drove was very charming, but of late years the part nearest to London has been swallowed up, as it were, by the demands of the mammoth city, and its rural beauty is unhappily entirely destroyed. One spot, however, at which we halted, still retains its charm. Within but a short distance of the city of unrest it seems to be imbedded in the heart of the country, and to be removed far away from the fever of London life. The fragrant hedges have not been cut away, the picturesque narrow lanes are as they have been for centuries past, and when the nightingale visits England its song fills the air with melody.

“Do you remember, Ben?” asked Philip, pointing to a pair of handsome gates which guarded the entrance to a private property, in which the beauties of nature had evidently been enhanced by human culture and taste. A winding carriage path had been formed between thick clusters of shining laurels; how far it

went we could not see, but Philip Ollier afterwards told us that it led to one of the most beautiful houses in England, and that in the twenty acres of ground by which it was surrounded were stables, orchards, pleasure and kitchen gardens, and everything that could contribute to man's happiness, and the enjoyment of life. On a plate affixed to the gates was a tablet, bearing the inscription, in raised letters of silver, "Mon Repos."

It was fitly named. A holy stillness pervaded the scene amidst which this perfect estate was imbedded; it might have been the abode of the spirit of peace.

"Yes, Phil," said Benjamin Longmore, "I remember."

We turned towards the friends for an explanation.

"Well," said Philip Ollier, "there is a little tale hanging to it. With Ben's permission I will relate the story."

"Of course Ben gives permission," said Mrs. Longmore.

"Of course I do," assented her husband.

"It commenced," said Philip Ollier, "a long time ago, when we were boys together—eh, Ben?"

"Yes, Phil."

"And very young boys, too," continued Philip Ollier.

"You, Mrs. Longmore, do not need to be told, but Miss Felicia does, perhaps, that when we were at school we were the closest of friends and the chummiest of chums. Had we been twin brothers we could not have been fonder of each other, and some of our schoolmates used to say that one of us ought to have been a girl. In those days we were in the habit of visiting a gardener who had been in my father's service; he lived a mile

further on, and is now heaven knows where. Almost always when we had a holiday it was our custom to spend it in this part of the country. One day we noticed a great stir on this very spot—carts, horses, bricks, masses of granite and marble, and a host of laborers. ‘Hallo,’ said we, ‘what’s going on here?’ We were told that a gentleman had bought the ground, and was going to build a wonderful house upon it. A little later we saw a number of trees, with their roots carefully protected brought here, and were told they were trees from foreign countries which were going to be planted in the grounds. The news excited us, and we began to take an interest in the affair, weaving all sorts of fancies in connection with the trees and their owner, wanting to know whether he was a foreign prince or a magician, and what kind of magic flowers or fruit the trees would bear. In short, we magnified it into a romance which in some way was connected with ourselves. Our friend the gardener happened to get employment here, and through him we made friends with others who were superintending the operations, and by a judicious or injudicious distribution of tips which made terrible holes in our pocket money, were allowed to come and go as privileged visitors. We saw the foundations laid and the walls grow; and we used to say to each other when a holiday was planned, that we wondered how our grand palace was getting on. *Our* palace, mind. The more we saw of it the keener became our interest, and it got to be our favorite subject of conversation. We said that when we were men it was such a house and grounds as we should like to own. ‘It is worth working for,’ said Ben once. ‘Well,’ said I, partly in fun, and just a little bit in earnest, ‘let us work

for it.' 'All right,' said Ben, quite seriously, 'we will work for it.' 'But after all, said I, coming to my sober senses, 'that is nonsense; it can never be anything more to us than a castle in the air.' 'I don't agree with you,' said Ben—he was always much more in earnest and more serious about things, Mrs. Longmore, than I—'I don't agree with you. I make up my mind, now and here, that one of these days I will be its master. When I am rich enough I shall buy it.' Boys are aggressively emulative, and I was no exception to the rule. 'If you make up your mind,' said I, 'to become master here, I shall make up my mind to do the same.' 'Very well,' said Ben, taking me seriously, as usual, 'let it be a race between us. Is it agreed?' 'Yes,' I replied, and then a possible difficulty occurred to me; 'but suppose the owner will not sell it when the time comes.' 'There are a good many years between now and then, said Ben, with a wise shake of his head; 'a thousand things will happen before we are ready.' So this compact, entered into in a spirit of wildness, became binding, and exists at the present day—we being," added Philip Ollier, laughing heartily, "as far off as ever from its accomplishment. Eh, Ben?"

"We are certainly no nearer to it," said Benjamin Longmore, "but before I die I shall be master of Mon Repos."

I stared at him, he spoke with such absolute conviction. He simply nodded, and said. "You will see."

"Did you know its name," I asked, "when your minds were made up to purchase it, willy nilly, from the owner?"

"No," replied Philip Ollier, "it was not till everything was finished that those silver letters were fixed on the gate."

“And who *is* the owner?” inquired Mrs. Longmore.

Philip Ollier laughed again. “We have not the slightest idea; it is an absurd feature in this disposal of his property that we never set eyes on him. It is clear he must be a gentleman of taste and refinement, for though we were not fortunate enough to make his acquaintance—which was a pity, you know, for he might have said to us, ‘What is the use of waiting? Take it now’—we understood that everything was being done under his direction and in accordance with his own design. To build and furnish the house, to lay out the grounds and cut the walks, to plant the foreign trees, *et cetera*, *et cetera*, took four years, and during the whole of that time we never missed an opportunity of watching their progress. We made ourselves so familiar with every detail that we could draw a plan of the rooms and gardens, and tell you the fashion of much of the furniture and belongings. There are famous pictures in the house, Mrs. Longmore, if they have not been removed; we saw them carried in, and on more than one occasion were permitted to enter the apartments while the furniture was being arranged. It was the whim of the owner not to take up his residence in the house till it was thoroughly ready for occupation, and it was this whim that afforded us opportunities of getting upon intimate terms with his treasures. Ben, we ought to have employed a watchman to see that none of them were taken away. The last day we were inside the grounds was at the winding up of one of our vacations, and these handsome gates had just been brought to the place. When our holidays came round again we trudged here to see our palace, and found the gates fixed and the walls around the estate very effect-

ually completed. I give you my word," said Philip Ollier, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes, "that we felt as if we were unlawfully debarred from entering upon our own property. There was no help for it, however; shut out we were, and there was no getting in. We couldn't very well ring and insist upon admittance, and if we stole an entrance by climbing over the wall we should doubtless have been marched off to the station house by a policeman. But to this hour we are sentimental enough to regard Mon Repos as connected with our lives in some strange way, and if it should happen that it were destroyed by fire I have no doubt we should look upon it as a personal loss. Of course we are a couple of fools, and having many a year ago reached the age when the stern affairs of life compel men to bid farewell to boyish romance, there is no excuse for us."

"There is every excuse for you," said Mrs. Longmore. "What would life be without its dreams, without its air-built castles? It does not harm us when we become men and women to dwell upon these fancies of our youth. If they do nothing more, they supply us with pleasant memories; but they really do more than this. They soften, they humanize, they keep our hearts green."

"Phil," said Benjamin Longmore, speaking still with determination, "I stick to my guns. Project yourself mentally into the future, and behold me master of Mon Repos, where I shall hold out the hand of welcome to my dear old friend."

"Or I to you," said Philip Ollier, with odd insistence.

"Or you to me," responded Benjamin Longmore.

"It is a race. Let the best man win."

"Or the luckiest, Ben."

"It doesn't matter which, so long as the end is reached."

"Above all," said Philip Ollier, in a low tone which did not reach Mrs. Longmore's ears ; but I heard the remark, "let us keep it from the grasp of Jones."

A dark shade flashed into Benjamin Longmore's face, but it passed away as he gazed upon his wife.

"Mon Repos !" she murmured. "It is an invitation to rest. How sweet to live in such a spot, after a life of toil and labor ! I can imagine no happier lot."

"You shall live to enjoy it," said Benjamin Longmore.

Mrs. Longmore sighed. I knew what she was thinking of : "I shall die the first week in September." And it was now near the end of July.

We rode quietly home, and it gladdened me to observe that the hands of husband and wife were clasped under her mantle. It is sweet to witness the spring love of young lovers, but far sweeter to witness the love of husband and wife after some years of companionship. I could not at that time, and I do not now, comprehend the contradictions in the character of Benjamin Longmore. It is to me a mystery how tender qualities and their opposites can reside in the breast of a mortal, how a man can be loving and cruel, the soul of kindness and the soul of injustice. If in the invisible air there are, as I have read, angels and evil spirits, tempting us, pleading to us, urging us to paths of darkness and paths of light, how careful we should be in every step we take in life that affects ourselves, in every judgment we pronounce that affects the lives of those who are bound to us, who depend upon us, who draw from us the love that lightens the darkest hour

and sustains their faith and hope in the journey from the cradle to the grave.

Philip Ollier was the first to express real alarm at Mrs. Longmore's state of health. He, as well as the members of the Longmore family, held me in esteem and overrated my services. Towards the middle of August he dropped a few words to me which showed that he was disturbed by certain signs in Mrs. Longmore which had forced themselves on his attention.

"All in this house," he was good enough to say, "depend upon you so much that you are looked upon as a guide in serious matters."

Not divining to what he was about to refer I said that life was made up of light as well as of serious matters, and that indeed it was small affairs which generally caused the greatest anxieties.

"That is true," he said, "but what is in my mind is a matter of the utmost gravity. You, more than any of us, except perhaps Mr. Longmore, have opportunities of judging how his wife really is. If we lost her"—he paused, and I did not break the silence. He continued: "I had it in my mind to speak to Mr. Longmore, but I do not wish to distress him I hope unnecessarily. I am not asking you to break any confidence which may have been reposed in you, but you may be able to relieve my anxiety. To speak plainly, Mrs. Longmore appears to me to be fading away, and every time I come to this house it is with a feeling of dread that something terrible may have occurred."

"I share your apprehensions," I said, painfully careful in my choice of words, "but what we are saying springs from the fear which is born of love; it scarcely can be said to have a more solid foundation. The doc-

tor speaks hopefully of our dear patient. We may be alarming ourselves unnecessarily, and it would be productive of mischief to let our feelings be seen."

"What pains me deeply," said Philip Ollier, "is that she never complains."

"She has the patience and the moral strength of an angel," I said. "It is not in her nature to grieve those she loves by the exhibition of selfishness in any form. Let us follow her example. We must conceal our fears, and hope for the best. Human skill and science can do no more than is being done."

He pressed my hand, and did not pursue the subject. Hope for the best! Yes, but I felt that it was hoping against hope; and yet at times, so cheerful and uncomplaining was my dear mistress that I was animated by the vision of a brighter prospect in the future. On the first day in September, however, the dark shadow that hung over the house showed itself all too plainly.

CHAPTER V.

THE SUN WAS SHINING AND THE SOFT AIR FLOWED INTO THE ROOM.

THE doctor, issuing from Mrs. Longmore's room, came to me as usual to say a few words about the patient. I always received his report, and conveyed it, word for word, to Benjamin Longmore in the evening, upon his return home from business.

"Mr. Longmore is not in the house?" he asked.

"No, sir," I replied, with a sinking heart. I felt what was coming.

"He comes home generally at about half past five, I believe."

"At about that time, sir," I said, clasping my hands. How pregnant are simple words upon such an occasion as this! The doctor's commonplace remarks were as far removed from the utterance of a death warrant as could well be conceived, but as clearly as though it were written upon the wall in letters of fire I saw the sentence pronounced.

"Well, well," said the doctor, after a moment's consideration, "there is no absolute necessity to summon him home. There is time yet, and we can wait, we can wait." He drew on his gloves thoughtfully as he spoke.

"You have bad news, sir," I said in a whisper.

He fixed his eyes on my face, and seemed to be studying my character, concerning which most probably he had not troubled himself before.

"You have the control of the domestic affairs of the house," he said, "and you are in a position of trust. Deservedly, deservedly."

"I thank you, sir, but you have not answered my question. You have bad news?"

"What we have to consider," he said, still parrying my question, from no unkindness I am sure, "is our patient—first of all, our patient."

"She is our first consideration, sir; she is the spiritual life of this home."

"The spiritual life. Yes, that is where it is. They are grave words, Miss Felicia."

"Yes, sir, they are grave words, but they were not spoken in the sense in which you received them."

"I cannot suppose they were, but I am sadly compelled to look upon the practical, the professional side."

"I implore you, sir, to relieve my anxiety."

He withdrew the glove he had just put on, and took my hand, and felt my pulse.

"If you will calm yourself, Miss Felicia, I will say something further. If you cannot control your feelings I shall say nothing more, and must ask you to be as little with Mrs. Longmore as possible until Mr. Longmore returns home."

"I am calm, sir."

I compelled myself to be so, and he gazed at me approvingly.

"That is better, much better; your pulse is less feverish already. What we must avoid, Miss Felicia,

is any appearance of anxiety or nervousness. Your pulse continues to improve. You will obey my directions?"

"Implicitly, sir."

"I can trust you. Mrs. Longmore has the highest opinion of you, Miss Felicia, and your presence and companionship are beneficial to her. They must continue to be, for her sake, for the sake of all who are connected with her."

"They shall be, sir."

His lips quivered slightly, and it was to me an indication that he had something more than a professional regard for my dear mistress; from the highest to the lowest every person who came into association with her loved this sweet and good woman.

"If it were possible," said the doctor, "I should wish her to see none but cheerful faces about her; but when Mr. Longmore hears what I have to say, that perhaps will be impossible. We must do the best we can, however."

As he seemed to wait for my assent I said, "Yes, sir, I understand."

"There is a grave change in Mrs. Longmore's condition. I do not say there is any immediate cause to expect the worst—that is, to-day or to-morrow—but I greatly fear it will come soon, perhaps before the week is out. It is sad, very, very sad, but all the science in the world cannot avert the Divine fiat."

"Is she suffering, sir, is she in pain?"

"I can give you a comforting answer. She is not suffering, except naturally in her heart at the thought that she soon will be separated from her husband and her child; she is not in pain. She will pass away in peace."

Something rose in my throat, and I turned my head from him ; and he was good enough not to reprove me.

“We must,” he continued, “all of us, do everything that lies in our power to make her last days on earth peaceful and happy. It is for that reason I wish to see Mr. Longmore myself ; and you will help me in this.”

“Indeed, indeed I will, sir.”

“I shall call again twice to-day, at two o’clock to see Mrs. Longmore, and at five to see her husband.”

“Are there any distressing symptoms, sir?”

“None. She is wasting away, surely and swiftly. She has but a small reserve of strength left, and that will be exhausted—too soon, too soon. It is wonderful how she has borne up, how she has managed to deceive us. But, there—nothing could have been done, except perhaps”—he shook his head impatiently—“to hasten her end.”

“She has no thought of herself, sir ; she thinks only of those she loves.”

“A good woman, Miss Felicia, a sweet and noble lady. Heaven’s gates are opening for her.”

“Pardon me, sir. She shall not see me so.”

I had covered my face with my hands. He took them in his own when I removed them, and gently patted them.

“And now, if you are quite strong, I will go ; I have other patients to visit. If you can induce her to take some strong soup every hour, a little at a time, and half a glass of port wine—no more, Miss Felicia—so much the better. I am satisfied that I leave her in good hands. Let her child be with her as long as she desires. Thwart her in nothing ; she will ask for nothing she ought not to have ; and she will do nothing she

ought not to do. She will husband her strength, the little she has left, for the sake, as you say, of those she loves."

He bade me good morning, and left me, and I went to my dear mistress, first bathing my eyes and face in cold water. She received me with a cheerful smile, and asked me if the doctor had been speaking to me, and I replied that he had.

"He knows all," she said, "and though he did not tell me in so many words, he feels as I feel. Is he coming again to-day?"

"Yes, at two o'clock."

"And again, after that?"

"Yes, at five, to see Mr. Longmore."

"It is very kind of him to break the news. My poor husband! How will he bear it? Miss Felicia, go and see if Gracie is asleep. If she is, do not disturb her, but leave word with the nurse that she is to bring my darling to me when she wakes. I am jealous of every moment now."

I did as she bade me, and returning, told her that Grace was sleeping.

"How wise and beneficent is nature," she said. "Childhood cannot realize these sorrows. When she sees me by and by she will think I am asleep."

I moved about the room, performing my duties quietly and without any outward demonstration of grief.

"The doctor says that I may have the window open if I wish. Open it, please. It is a lovely day."

The sun was shining, and the soft air flowed into the room. There were flowers on the sill, and from the garden came the sweet piping of birds.

"The world is very beautiful, Miss Felicia; it is filled with sweet marvels. But for you I should be sorry to leave it."

"The confidence you have in me gladdens my heart, my dear mistress."

"Your dear friend, Miss Felicia."

"My dear friend," I said.

"If it were given to me to realize a wish I should ask the Divine Arbiter to allow me to stay with my child, to see her grow into womanhood, to share her joys and sorrows; but it is not to be, and I have schooled myself to resignation and content. I think with ineffable gratitude that you will be by her side, and that she will have in you a counsellor and a guide, a protector from the rocks and shoals which lie in the path of young and trustful lives."

"I devote myself to her, dear friend; but without me her own good instincts would guide her aright."

"It is my hope that she will grow into goodness and virtue. Especially do I desire that she should imbibe, as she will, through you, a proper understanding of the value of the contradictory influences by which she will be surrounded, by which we are all surrounded as we travel onwards. I can raise up a picture of her as she will be in the first flush of womanhood. She will be very beautiful."

"She is sure to be; I have never seen a sweeter face."

"How I pity those who are not so endowed! Beauty is a heavenly gift, and in association with a pure soul, unstained by worldly temptation, has a great power for good. I think of that when I think of my husband. He will be proud of Gracie, she will sweeten

his life; it will give her influence over him. You will also be his friend, Miss Felicia."

"I will be all to him that he will allow me to be."

"He has a regard and respect for you; he has spoken to me about you many times, and said how fortunate we were in finding you. He thinks you have very sound opinions."

"Except, I am afraid, that I am not worldly wise."

"Oh, yes, he believes that, but only so far as your own interests are concerned. He told me what you said about being better able perhaps to look after the interests of others, and he is convinced that it is so. You will take my place with my dear Gracie. I hope she will not forget me; I should like to feel that I leave an abiding memory with her, young as she is."

"She will remember you all her life."

"All her life," she murmured, "I shall watch over her."

Her eyes closed as she spoke the words; I moved softly to her side, and saw that she had fallen into slumber. The moment she awoke I brought her child to her. Shortly afterwards the doctor called again, and exchanged cheering words with her. When he left her I accompanied him to the door, and asked if there was still no hope.

"There is none," he said, "there can be none. If she is brighter to-morrow, if she seems stronger, do not deceive yourselves. The fate that hangs over her is inevitable. Miss Felicia, I would give double, treble my fees if I could save her. When nature pronounces sentence, art is powerless."

I cannot refrain here from paying a tribute to this kind gentleman, whose life is an honor to the profession he

adorns. But indeed in what ranks of professional labor can more unselfish kindness be found than in the ranks of those who minister to the sick? Surely there must be some beneficent influence in the work they do that humanizes and softens the heart, that makes it respond willingly and cheerfully to the appeals of those who suffer? Numberless are the instances that can be adduced of the wonderful goodness of doctors, renowned and eminent, who sacrifice their time without expectation or desire of return for the inestimable services they render. I have no hesitation in saying that of all arts it is the most ennobling and beautiful, and that its record of kind deeds is matchless and unapproachable. With all my heart I say, "God bless the doctors for the good they do, for the good they are enabled to do!"

At half past five Benjamin Longmore returned home. His face fell as the doctor went forward to meet him.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "What is the matter?"

I was in the room when he and the doctor met, and I left it immediately. They were closeted together for a quarter of an hour or so, and then Benjamin Longmore came out with a face like death itself.

"You must not go in to her like that, sir," I said. "You will frighten her."

He looked at me helplessly, and allowed me to lead him back to the room. The doctor had taken his parture.

"Is it true?" he muttered. "Can it be true?"

"Be strong, my dear master." I said. "I can offer you no consolation, but for the sake of the dear sufferer be strong!"

"Oh, my wife, my darling!" he cried, and covering his face with his hands, burst into tears.

I did not disturb him; one's nature, whether it be demonstrative or placid, must assert itself, and in matters so sorrowful as this it is best that the first ebullition of feeling should be unchecked. Therefore I did not direct or attempt to control him, but waited till he regained command of himself. This he did quite suddenly, to my surprise, and even in that moment of grief I could not help thinking that although I had lately devoted much attention to the study of Benjamin Longmore's character, there were depths in it which I had not yet sounded. As I have said, he gained command over his feelings quite suddenly, and I saw, from his manner that he was not likely to allow them to sway him in his wife's presence.

"Can I see her now?" he asked in a humble tone.

"Yes, sir," I replied. "You will remember that it will be for her good not to give way."

He nodded, and we went together to Mrs. Longmore's room. It was as much as I could do to keep my tears back when I witnessed how she received him. With infinite tenderness and sweet pity in her eyes she extended her hands to him—as though it was he who was shortly to be torn from the sphere of love and willing duty.

I smoothed her pillow, and saying I would be within call if I was wanted I left the room. It was nearly eight o'clock before Benjamin Longmore quitted her side. I had kept dinner back for him, and had it on the table ready when he entered the dining room.

"Come, sir," I said, "you must be hungry, and must force yourself to eat." This last injunction because he had shaken his head. "You must do what you can to sustain your strength; you will be the better able to sustain hers."

The argument was irresistible ; he sat down and ate, but he ate in silence. I stole to Mrs. Longmore's room before his meal was finished, and returning told him that his wife was sleeping.

"She will not sleep long," I said ; "she generally wakes after she has slumbered an hour or two."

Without waiting for the cloth to be cleared he began to write letters, and looking up once, said :

"I am excusing myself from business, Miss Felicia, and shall not leave the house this week."

"It will be a comfort to her, sir," I said, "to have you with her."

"Tell me," he said. "You are a wise woman, much wiser than I thought you in the beginning of our acquaintance. Do you believe the doctor is right?"

"If I could only believe otherwise, sir," I said, and was going on when he interrupted me.

"That is enough. No one holds out a ray of hope."

He sat in gloomy silence, biting his lip nervously, and did not speak till we heard a soft knock at the street door.

"That is Philip Ollier," he said. "For the last month he has been careful to knock very quietly, so that my dear wife should not be disturbed by a loud or abrupt sound. He, you and all others have seen what I have been blind to. And yet—and yet—who loves her as I love her?"

Some time afterwards, in recalling these natural words, I thought of what he said to me when we first met, that his wife's eyes were in her heart, and his in his head. In matters of pure sympathy there lies all the difference.

He was in his passion of grief when Phillip Ollier

came in. He cast but one glance upon Benjamin Longmore, and he knew all.

"Ben, Ben!" he said, with his arms across his friend's shoulders.

"The worst has not happened, Phil," sobbed Benjamin Longmore, "but it will soon. We have not long to wait."

My duties took me from the room, and I was glad that my master had a sympathetic soul by his side to comfort and sustain him.

At ten o'clock that night Mrs. Longmore awoke; I was sitting by her bed. There was a strange look in her eyes, which presently, however, recovered their clear light.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CHILDREN CAME TOWARDS HER, TOUCHED HER DRESS, AND GAZED UP AT HER AS THEY WOULD HAVE GAZED UP AT AN ANGEL.

“You have been sitting here for some time,” she said.

“Yes,” I said.

“I must tell you of a fancy I have had,” she said, but she broke off by asking whether Gracie was sleeping well and quietly. To more completely assure her I went to the child’s room, and came back and told her that Gracie was fast asleep.

“And my husband?” she asked.

“He is down stairs ; Mr. Ollier is with him.”

“Dear Phillip Ollier ! With two such friends as you and that good man always with him, what harm can befall !”

And yet that she had some hidden cause for apprehension in the future was evident to me ; but I did not trouble her by inquiring into it, knowing that if she required sympathy and advice in any matter she wished to broach she would seek them from me.

“About my fancy,” she said. “Perhaps it is because the doctor has confirmed what I have known for some time that I was visited by it. Indeed, before I went to sleep—how long ago, Miss Felicia ?”

“Two hours. It is now ten o'clock.”

“When I closed my eyes, and felt that sleep would soon hold me fast in its arms, I thought. ‘Shall I wake up again in this world?’ Shall I see the dear ones who fill my heart? Shall I feel their kisses again on my lips?’ I would have struggled against the disposition for sleep, but I felt that it would be wrong to do so, and presently I became unconscious. I awoke many minutes ago, but did not dare to open my eyes; I lay quite still, thinking whether I was alive or dead. I knew that some form was near me, and I thought it might be the form of an angel, and not a human being. Should I repine, or be glad, if I found that I had left my home and my husband and child? Upon this came other thoughts. Is there grief, is there sorrow in the future state, or is it all light and joy, and happiness? Then I breathed the prayer, ‘God’s will be done.’ I opened my eyes, and saw you sitting here, and I was glad. Give me your hand, Miss Felicia—ah, that is the clasp of a friend. Yes, I was truly glad. Eternity is long, and my time here is so short. To-day is Tuesday?”

“Yes.”

“Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday—the day of rest! I shall live till then, dear Felicia. The days are still long, and I think we shall have bright weather all the week. Step downstairs and ask Philip Ollier if he can let Edward come here every day this week. It will be a holiday for the dear lad, for he must not know—nor must Gracie. Be careful of that. I want to see Gracie and Edward together as much as possible.”

I went down to the friends, and gave Mrs. Longmore’s message, and Philip Ollier said his boy should

come. Afterwards he asked whether and when Mrs. Longmore could see him.

“I will let you know to-morrow,” I said.

The friends gave a simultaneous sigh of relief, and their faces momentarily brightened. They caught from my words that there was no immediate danger, and that Mrs. Longmore would live over the morrow. Immediately afterwards Philip Ollier took his departure; he would not keep Benjamin Longmore from his wife.

On the following morning Edward Ollier came, and the two children sat in Mrs. Longmore’s room, playing and talking quietly. Then and always there was nothing boisterous in their intercourse. Mrs. Longmore lay back, contemplating them happily. When they were away at their dinner she told me that at length she had had her wish. She had dreamt of Gracie’s future.

“I saw her, a bright and beautiful woman—and Edward was with her. It will be, dear Felicia; it is a message from heaven.”

It is impossible for me to say whether the children had any premonition of what was soon to happen, but it is certain from their tender and more than usually gentle bearing towards Mrs. Longmore that they were dominated by an unaccustomed influence. They would stand by her bedside for a long time together, without uttering a word unless Mrs. Longmore spoke to them and asked questions, Gracie fondling her mother’s hand or stroking her hair, and Edward very solemn and still, with his eyes on her face. Perhaps they were impressed by the quietude of the servants, who loved their mistress, or by our own demeanor, or by the frequent visits of the doctor. Each day they went into the garden, and coming back, laid some simple flowers on her pil-

low. How she treasured these love offerings! Each time the fresh flowers were brought in she gave me yesterday's tribute, and asked me to put them in her coffin.

"What are you thinking of, Ned?" she asked once, as the lad was gazing solemnly on her.

"Of my mamma," he answered.

"My poor boy!" she murmured, drawing him to her breast.

When I took him away I saw that he had been shedding tears, but he said nothing. He was five years older than Grace, and already showed indications of strength of character which augured well for the future. The children worshipped each other; I can find no other term to express the affection which existed between them.

So the week passed away, until Saturday arrived. To-morrow would be Sunday---the day of rest!

It was wonderful that there appeared to be no diminution of Mrs. Longmore's strength, no dimming of her intellectual powers. But the doctor had warned me.

"You will see a change to-morrow," he said.

With what vividness are the solemn events of that week ever present to me! The memory of those days will be with me to my last hour. Every time I saw Mrs. Longmore's eyes open after a slumber there was for a moment a questioning look in them; then she would smile at me and gently nod her head. Two or three times a day, and always when night was coming on, Benjamin Longmore would take my place by her side, and I used to think that nothing that could occur in his future life would efface the lessons he must have learned in those solemn hours. To me Mrs. Longmore

was, and is, a saint in her qualities of patience, faith, and mercy.

There is something I have not mentioned. Not alone in her house were her sweet qualities displayed. She possessed in her own right a small income ; it was a legacy left to her by her father, and its exact amount was fifty-two pounds, that is, one pound a week. Benjamin Longmore was the manager of a tea business in the city, and his salary was six hundred pounds per annum. Upon this the household was maintained in fair comfort, but nothing was put by for a rainy day, as the saying is, Benjamin Longmore being by no means economically inclined. His firm conviction that he would at some time become very wealthy may have been the cause of this disregard for the future ; anyway the fact remained, that rent, servants, clothing, and the maintenance of the house swallowed up every shilling of his salary ; and he was quite satisfied that it should be so. His wife's income of fifty-two pounds he would not touch, and with his full concurrence and consent she disposed of it thus : Half of it was dispensed in charities, the other half was put by for Grace, to accumulate till she was twenty-one years of age. Then it was to be hers absolutely. Of the investment of this twenty-five pounds a year Benjamin Longmore took charge, and as he had a shrewd head for business it was invested well. There remained for Mrs. Longmore's charities ten shillings a week.

Until she was unable to leave the house, except in a carriage, Mrs. Longmore dispensed her charities herself, visiting her pensioners and making herself acquainted with their special wants ; but from the time that she was unable to go out these charitable offices were delegated

to me, and I need not say that I undertook them gladly. It was then I discovered that she, too, was wise in her way, and that the money she gave was given with discrimination. And yet, dare I, who am no political economist, say as much? In charity I have but one thought, and Mrs. Longmore and I were alike in the view we took. Did the persons she relieved require relief? There was no question of deserving. Here was a family that required food, that were destitute of clothing, that had no boots fit to wade through deep snow. Here was a mother with a young baby, and want was staring them in the face—want with its gaunt and wolfish eyes. The question whether the family was deserving or not did not occur to Mrs. Longmore, and did not occur to me. True, the father was a lazy scoundrel, who would not work, who ill-treated his wife and children; but the family were starving. True, the mother with the young baby had no husband; but the wolf was at the door. Here was the argument that, in our belief, with mercifully-resistless weight crushed down all others. Human beings were craving for food, hunger was tearing at their vitals. Came the angel, my dear, dear mistress and friend, to the despairing ones, and bought them bread and clothing, and did not leave them till the terror and the horror were gone, at least for a little while. How then, in the face of so-called charity *that waits*, and temporizes, and discusses, and measures—how can I say that either my dear mistress or I was wise in doing as we did? I see the warning finger shaken at me, I hear the carefully-considered words addressed to me, that I am ministering to beggary, fostering it, encouraging it, and that I am an enemy to the well-being of society. How shall I answer

—what shall I plead in extenuation? That while we wait the inducement to crime is being engendered in the souls of those whose bodies require to-day what may possibly be given to-morrow, or the day after, *when it is too late*? A weak argument, I may be told. Perhaps so, but it is the strongest I can find, and I stand to it. As my honored mistress did, God in heaven (where her dear spirit now is) bless her for it!

It properly belongs to the story I am telling to relate the incidents of one memorable day.

When the weakness was coming upon her, and Mrs. Longmore felt—she confessed as much to me subsequently—that the time was approaching when she would have to hand over to a deputy the merciful offices which she was performing herself, she asked me for the first time to accompany her on her rounds. We rode in an omnibus to the poorest part of the city, down east end way, and there my mistress and I went into a very wretched room—a room horrible with gloom and misery. But as she stood in it in her silver gray dress, her sweet and pitiful eyes gazing around the fetid walls and on the pinched faces of hungry children, I thought of the Son of God, and I recognized in her the true type of Christianity. I could have knelt at her feet and worshipped her, and in my heart of hearts I blessed and revered her. Ah, me! The children came towards her, touched her dress, and gazed up at her as they would have gazed up at an angel. She knelt and said she had brought something nice for them, and opened the baskets we carried, and there was food which we had bought on the road. They laughed and clapped their hands, and the mother trembled and cried, and we waited while they ate, my

sainted mistress talking cheerfully all the time, and I with my poor efforts striving to aid her. My heart over-brims my eyes as I recall the incidents of that day. Pardon me awhile ; I must lay aside my pen.

CHAPTER VII.

I HAVE READ OF WOMEN LIKE YOU, BUT HAVE NEVER BEFORE
MET WITH ONE.

So the poor children were satisfied, and what remained of the food was given to the mother for tomorrow. Then my dear mistress called for cold water, and washed the hands and faces of the children, and tidied their clothes, having brought with her needles, thread, and buttons, and soap, and some towels which she could spare from her store at home.

“Now, children,” she said, “mother will read you the beginning of a nice story before you go to bed.”

The book she gave the mother was not a religious book, but a simple and amusing tale, with a good moral hidden in its plot. I remember that on this occasion it was an old book of Edward Ollier’s which his father had given him on a birthday. My dear mistress was an assiduous beggar of clothes and books which had served their day, and apportioned them with her own hands to those who most needed them. She was very fond of begging from her friends such tales of adventure as she approved of, and she would spend hours in fastening loose leaves and mending broken bindings. But this is wandering a little from the special events of this memorable day.

Mrs. Longmore's Christian task being finished, she shook hands with the mother and children, and promising to come again, stood for a moment smiling and nodding brightly at them.

What had come over them? What had come over the place? It was the same place, they were the same children, but all was changed. Their faces were no longer sullen and pinched; there was a light in their eyes, there was gratitude in their hearts; and the room was transformed from an abode of gloom to an abode of hope. Mrs. Longmore nodded and smiled once more, and went away, leaving sunshine behind her.

"Miss Felicia," she said in a blithe voice, when we were in the streets, "that has done me good. I feel strong enough to walk a long way. We will ride to Regent Street, and walk home through the Park."

There was music in her voice, and the motion of her limbs were like those of a young maid in the full flush of health. At the end of Regent Street we alighted and commenced our walk.

The day was cold, but the air was dry, and there was a bright light in the sky. When we arrived at the Park, we sat on a bench and watched the children feeding the ducks. I did not observe, until he rose and strolled slowly away, that a man, holding a little girl by the hand, was sitting on the same bench upon which we were resting. Mrs. Longmore had seen him, and now, as he strolled aimlessly towards the water, her eyes followed him. This drew my attention more particularly to him and the child, and I observed that they seemed to be both respectably dressed; but a closer observance confirmed an impression I had formed that this appearance of respectability was due to the

care that had been bestowed upon their clothes, which were skillfully mended and patched. Their boots were well worn, but they had been blackened; their hands and faces were clean, and their hair properly combed and brushed.

“Look at that man’s face, Miss Felicia,” said Mrs. Longmore.

I did so. Not only the face, but the varying expressions upon it, were such as to compel attention. His features were strongly marked, and there was a look of pain in his fine eyes. This look changed into one of yearning as he stopped and watched the children throwing food to the ducks. Two children, comfortably dressed and accompanied by their nurse, were taking buns from a full bag and throwing them in large pieces upon the water. His eyes wandered from the ducks and the buns to the little girl whose hand he held tight in his own.

“He is in trouble,” said Mrs. Longmore, and she walked towards him; I followed her, and stood near enough to hear what passed.

Mrs. Longmore stooped and patted the cheek of the child.

“May I ask your name, my dear?” she said.

The child nestled closer to her father, and raised her eyes shyly, but could not muster courage to reply.

“Her name is Mary,” said the man, and casting a glance upon Mrs. Longmore walked onwards a few paces.

Mrs. Longmore lingered a moment at this rebuff, and then walked softly after them.

“I beg you to pardon me if I am in error,” she said in the gentle voice which went straight to the heart of all who heard it, “but your child—and you, also, if

you will forgive me for saying so—seems as if she wanted a friend. My name is Longmore; this is my friend, Miss Felicia. I have a little girl of my own, just the age of your child, and I was attracted by her sweet face.”

“And by mine, may I ask,” said the man, speaking respectfully but firmly, “which is not sweet?”

“Yes,” replied Mrs. Longmore frankly, “and by yours.”

“Can you read what is written on it?” he asked, his eyes gazing into hers.

“Not clearly,” said Mrs. Longmore, “but something moved me to address you. I can say nothing in excuse of the liberty I have taken.”

“It isn’t much of a liberty,” said the man, pondering over her words, and still gazing steadily at her, “and no excuse is required. Friendly voices are not so common that a man should shut his ears to them. Do I look like a beggar, madam?”

“Indeed, indeed you do not,” said Mrs. Longmore earnestly.

“And yet you, a perfect stranger to me—hold hard a bit, though. Perhaps you know me.”

“I do not. I never saw you before.”

“It is strange, and unusual—very unusual. I was about to say that, although you do not take me for a beggar, you speak to me in a manner which has a sympathetic touch in it. I thank you in my little Mary’s name.”

His speech was that of a man who had received a good education, and I was attracted by it and by his bearing.

“How old is Mary?”

“Four.”

“That is about the age of my little girl. Her name is Grace.”

“Plainly, madam, why are you speaking to me?”

“Have I not told you? Because you both seem to need a friend.”

“And if we did, would you be that friend?”

“If it lies in my power to be.”

“There is a singular magnetism in you,” said the man, “and though I am believed to have a strong character of my own, it has a kind of power over me. I have a respect for strength of character in man or woman. Perhaps that doesn’t please you; you would rather I said gentleman or lady.”

“No; I think your expression is proper.”

“Would you mind my thinking a bit, madam?”

“Not at all; but do not leave me without giving me the opportunity I desire?”

“Of proving yourself a friend?”

“Yes, of proving myself a friend.”

“It is curious,” he said.

He was about to move away with his child when he found himself in a difficulty. He still held one of Mary’s hands, but Mrs. Longmore held the other, and the child did not seem inclined to leave my mistress. He hesitated, then dropped Mary’s hand, and stepped aside. I saw that a struggle was going on within him; two or three times he turned his thoughtful face to Mrs. Longmore and his little girl, and contemplated them while he was mentally debating. Presently he came to some sort of conclusion.

“It would be folly,” he said, “perhaps worse than folly to throw aside the helping hand when it is held out to me. It would be a bad kind of pride in a man in my position, with a child who claims support

from him. For her sake, then, if not for my own."

Here I ventured to say a word. I saw that my dear mistress was tired, and I asked him if he would mind sitting down with her, telling him that she was not strong. This turned the current of his thoughts, and afforded him an opportunity, of which he instantly availed himself, to show some sympathy for her in return for the sympathy she had shown for him.

We walked to the bench we had left, and sat down, and Mrs. Longmore took Mary on her lap. Without letting the child see or hear her she motioned with her head to the man, and asked him, in a whisper if she had a mother.

"No," he answered in a voice as quiet as hers.

Mrs. Longmore drew the child closer to her breast, and the man's lips trembled a little.

"Mary," he said, "go and look at the ducks and the water."

Evidently accustomed to obey him the child lifted herself from Mrs. Longmore's lap, and went towards the water, where she stood, gazing wistfully at the fun that was going on there.

"A man doesn't want his child to hear everything he says," the man said; "young as Mary is she might remember with pain and humiliation a painful and humiliating confession. My name is MacMillan, John MacMillan, and I am a working carpenter. I was not brought up to the trade; my father was a shopkeeper in rather a good way, and he intended that I should be a shopkeeper after him. During an indolent boyhood—the indolence was not of my choice; I was not apprenticed to any trade—I took a liking to fancy carpentering, and buying books and tools with my pocket money, made myself rather proficient. Our house was

filled with all sorts of nick-nacks of my manufacturing, and I was rather vain and proud of my work. My father dying, I discovered that his affairs were in confusion. What he left behind him barely paid his debts. Everything had to be given up to his creditors, business, stock, and our home. That being done, there was I, aground, with an old mother to support, and a young sweetheart I wanted to marry. My fancy carpentering served me in good stead ; I obtained employment, and managed to get a living ; and then I married. My poor mother did not trouble us long ; a year after my marriage I followed her to the grave. During her last days she had one vain wish ; I am doing no wrong to her memory to call it vain. I am a man of strong opinions, and I never hesitate to express them. She wished for a fine funeral, and she made me promise to give her one. A promise given to a dying mother is sacred, and I kept mine, without undergoing any change in the opinion I held upon the matter—which is, that these expensive funerals, in poor or rich, are a woful mistake. Perhaps one day some part of the money wasted upon these exhibitions will be devoted to better purposes, to helping the poor, for instance. However, I was much commended for the fine show I gave ; I gained the praise of my neighbors and lost my money, which I could ill afford to lose. To tell the truth, I got into debt a bit through the funeral. ‘Never mind,’ said I, ‘it is only working a little harder for a few months.’ That was easily said, but not so easily done. Work got slack, and I worked short hours instead of long. Then came a strike, and I was thrown out for sixteen weeks. That made things worse, and though I did not get deeper in debt I could not pay the money I owed. When the strike was over I got work again,

but somehow I did not get on as well as I did before the strike. I could get work only for three or four days a-week, and this I put down to my opinions. There was no help for it, and I did my best, but you will see that it was a hard struggle. I had a good wife, but she was delicate, and it was through her painful efforts to assist me—doing things when I was at work, or seeking it, which I had no notion of—that she took to her bed. She did not leave it; after four months of suffering she was carried to the churchyard. There was no fine funeral this time, and there would have been none even if I could have afforded it, for my wife and I were of one mind on this question. She left me a child, my little Mary there, and I put my shoulder to the wheel more vigorously than ever, doing not only fine carpentering when it fell in my way, but any other thing in the way of making up tradesmen's books and that like, that I could pick up. Bad as things were, they got worse. It is a man's duty, to the last effort there is in him, to give his child food and to bring her up respectably, and I did not throw away the least chance of earning a few shillings or a few pence. No merit to me. I love work, and if I were a rich man and could not get it without paying for it, I would pay for it cheerfully, and go begging for it with my pockets full as I am now begging for it with my pockets empty. I owe it to myself to say that I paid my creditors in the end; it was not because they threatened me with extreme measures, but because what a man owes must be paid, though he stand bare in the face of the world. How did I pay them, you may ask. Well, there was a watch my father gave me which I clung to, upon my word, as though it was alive. That went. There was my wife's wedding ring, and a gold keeper. They

went. There were a few books I treasured. They went. A few other things as well, and I got a clear quittance, and could look people in the face. I did not want to quite lose my self-respect. I kept rubbing on, and never lost hold of the anchor of hope." He turned his face from us and said: "But it is slipping from me now."

Mrs. Longmore laid her hand upon his arm, and he said simply, "Thank you. I am coming to the end of my story. The worst feature in it is that I could not obtain regular employment, and no man tried harder than I did; as hard, no doubt, for there are hundreds of others in the same plight as myself. Then came something harder than all. Being out of work, with no means to buy bread, I parted with my tools one by one. For a week or so we lived upon steel; you don't get much for tools, you know. And now, when I had the chance of work I could not take it because my tools were gone. We have had some trying days lately, my Mary and I, and you may wonder what brought me to this pleasure ground. Well, I have been endeavoring since six o'clock this morning to get a job—anything, I did not care much what it was, so that I might get my child a breakfast. She has asked for it—natural, is it not? Whom else should she ask? 'Wait a little, child,' I said to her, 'it is quite early yet.' Then a fancy seized her of coming into a park. I was in this neighborhood, trying my last chance with a builder, with the usual results, and I said, 'Come along, Mary, we'll go into the park and look at the ducks.' Not much of a meal that. You saw me, I dare say, envying those youngsters feeding the ducks with buns—see, they are shaking the last crumbs from the bag. Well, I had it in my mind to ask them to give Mary a bun

instead of the ducks, but though my hungry child was holding my hand I could not screw up my courage. A father should have more nerve than that, should he not? So I stood there, wondering how it was going to end when you came and spoke to me. My story is told. Pray forgive me for wearying you."

"You have not wearied me, friend," said Mrs. Longmore. "You have parted with your tools. Could you get work if you had them?"

He looked at her sternly. "Must I make myself a beggar?"

"No," she replied firmly, "you are a man, and you must perform a man's duty. Would not you, in my position, do to another like yourself as I beg you to allow me to do to you?"

"I might."

"You would. I am not, as you are, strong-minded. Answer me honestly, as honestly as you have already spoken."

"O, you believe my story?"

"You have told me the truth, and I am grateful to you."

Though I saw he was much shaken—as who in his place would not have been?—so proud and rebellious was he that he still wavered.

"London," he said slowly, "can boast of a thousand professional beggars who could tell you a much more plausible tale than I have related."

"I desire you to answer me," said Mrs. Longmore, and in all my experience I had never heard her speak with so much determination. "Could you get work if you had your tools?"

"It is as good as promised to me."

"How much will they cost to get?"

He put his fingers in his waistcoat pocket, than hastily withdrew them with an angry shake of his head. The pawn tickets were in that pocket, and to exhibit them was to exhibit what he looked upon as a degradation.

"I can tell you the exact sum," he said. "It is within one penny of eighteen shillings."

"Do me the pleasure of borrowing this from me. I can well spare it, and more."

She put two sovereigns into his hands, which was not extended to receive them. The action was so quietly done, and her manner was so unostentatious, that no person, observing them, would have dreamt that money had passed from one to the other. She had extracted the gold from her purse without either of us being aware of it. It did not escape my attention that when he felt the money in his hand he glanced around with a kind of shame in his face, to assure himself that there were no chance witnesses of what had been done.

There was a brief silence. Then the man said:

"No, I will not borrow so much. One will be sufficient."

"But there is to-day to provide for," urged Mrs. Longmore.

"One will be sufficient," he repeated.

Without further remonstrance she took back the sovereign.

"I will not thank you," he said. "I cannot. It is possible that you have saved me. I have read of women like you, but have never before met with one. The sovereign will be paid back to you. Kindly give me your address."

Another woman would have refused; my mistress at once handed him her card. At that moment his little daughter looked over her shoulder at him.

"Do not offer anything to my child," he said to my mistress.

"I will not," she answered.

"Mary," he called, and the child came to us. "Look at this lady. I want you to remember her face, as I shall, to my dying day. Do you think you will know her again when you see her?"

"O, yes, father."

"Say, 'God bless you.'"

"God bless you!" said the child, raising her head.

"And you, my dear," said my mistress, kissing the little girl.

Then, holding out her hand to the man, she beckoned to me, and we left them.

Thus ended this memorable day, and the seed that was sown bore flower and fruit.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DREAM WITHIN A DREAM.

It was Sunday, and I noted the change foretold by the doctor. At intervals in the early morning my dear mistress became so still and quiet that more than once I inclined my ear to her heart to convince myself that it had not ceased to beat. Whenever I did this she opened her eyes and smiled sweetly on me. Once she said, "I am still with you, Felicia." Towards noon she brightened up a little, and it was then that she asked that Philip Ollier should come to her. She had appointed this day on which to see him and bid him farewell. He and his son were both in the house.

"And let Ned come, too," she said.

They came softly into the room, and stood by her bed.

"Ned, my dear lad," she said, "stoop and kiss me. I am hardly strong enough to raise myself."

Ned lowered his head, and they kissed each other.

"You and Gracie are great friends," she said.

"Yes; I am very fond of Gracie." He showed in his solemn face a sense of what was impending, and he spoke in a whisper.

"Always be, Ned, my dear."

"I will be, always."

"With you and Gracie, my dear, this is the playtime of life. By and by you will be a man, and she a woman. It is then I want you to be true to her."

"I shall never be anything else."

"To think of you being a man, a great tall man! And my Gracie a beautiful woman! It is almost too wonderful to believe. Then you will have to work, Ned."

"I am going to."

"Whatever you do, Ned, never mind how high it is or how low, never lose sight of two things—your faith and trust in God, and the duty you have to perform. They will help to make you happy."

"I will do as you say."

There must have been a thought in his mind that the promise required some sort of binding action, for he held up his right hand as he spoke the last words.

"I could not speak to Gracie, my dear, as I am speaking to you. She would not understand. But you do, do you not, Ned, when I say that a faithful friendship is one of the most beautiful things in life."

"I think I understand; and I will be Gracie's faithful friend."

“Kiss me again, dear child, and then I wish to speak to your good father alone.”

She held him in her embrace for a little while, and then his father raised him from the bed and led him softly to the door, whispering to him that he was not to leave the house, but wait below. Ned's eyes were overflowing, but he did not allow the least sound to escape him.

“He is a dear, good lad,” said my dear mistress to Philip Ollier when the lad was gone, “and has a wonderful sense of things. He will be a great comfort to you.”

“I know he will be, dear Mrs. Longmore,” said Philip Ollier. “I look forward to his future without fear.”

“Felicia, leave me and Mr. Ollier alone for a few minutes.”

I do not know what passed between them, but when Philip Ollier came out there was in his eyes the look of a man who had been praying.

“Go in to her,” he said, as he brushed past me.

“Felicia,” said my mistress, “I want my child.”

Very soon Grace was lying by her mother's side. Then came the bitter trial, the terrible consciousness that her darling was so soon to be deprived of her mother's watchful love. I witnessed the silent struggle that was being waged in my dear mistress's heart. She conquered, and I saw on her lips, but did not hear the words, for indeed they were not spoken, “God's will be done.” With what exquisite tenderness did she from that moment devote herself to make this last solemn hour an hour of bright memories for Grace! She tried to sing the child's favorite song, and breaking down, said :

"We will sing it together one day in heaven, darling."

"O, yes, mamma," said Grace.

Then she asked Grace to sing her to sleep, and the little one began, but at this time of day it was usual for Grace herself to sleep, and before her song was finished the broken words hung upon her lips, and there was a holy silence in the room, the slumbering child, with her lovely lips parted, face to face with her dying mother.

"My darling, my darling!" murmured my mistress. "I will watch over you and guard you. Dear Lord in heaven, keep her heart pure, make her life happy and blameless!"

So they lay for half an hour, and then my mistress whispered to me to take her away. I waited till the last, last kisses were given, and carried Grace to her own little cot, where I left her asleep. When I returned Benjamin Longmore was with his wife, holding her hand.

"There is something I have to say, my dear," said my mistress, "and it must be said now, and in Miss Felicia's presence. It is a wish I have. If you will grant it you will bring a blessing upon me, upon yourself, upon our darling child."

"Whatever you say shall be done," said Benjamin Longmore.

"During my illness my mind has been filled with thought of you and Grace, of your future, of hers. You are absent from the house the greater part of the day. I cannot bear to think that our darling will be left to the care of strangers."

"That she shall not be." He turned to me with sudden trouble. "Miss Felicia, you are not going to leave us?"

"No," I replied, "I have no such thought, no such wish."

"You anticipate me, dear," said my mistress. "My most earnest desire is that Miss Felicia shall have the care of our darling till she is a woman and can judge for herself. Miss Felicia has been with us now a long time, and I have grown to love her. I want her to remain with you and Grace always; I want her, as far as she can do so, to take my place with our child. It shall be so, shall it not?"

"It shall be so," said Benjamin Longmore. "I give you my sacred promise that my home shall be hers as long as she chooses to have it so, and that no one but she shall have charge of our dear Gracie."

"My dear master and mistress," I said, "if you had asked me the one wish of my heart, it is this. I accept the sacred duty, and devote my life to its performance. As I deal by your dear child, so may I be dealt by."

Mrs. Longmore feebly stretched out her hand to me, and I kissed it reverently, and I kissed the hand which Benjamin Longmore extended to me.

"How good you are to me," Mrs. Longmore said to her husband. "How good you have ever been! Miss Felicia will take upon herself also the disposal of the little I have been able to give away in charity. She will dispose of it as I should have done. When Gracie is a little older I should wish her to accompany Miss Felicia sometimes, to learn the lessons which I should have taught her had it pleased God to spare me."

"Everything shall be done as you desire," said Benjamin Longmore.

"I think I will sleep a little. Do not leave me. Miss Felicia will want a little money; she will understand soon what I mean, and will tell you. You will

allow her to take ten pounds from Gracie's portion this year."

"Yes, my dear wife—my poor darling!"

He checked the outburst of grief, and she took his hand and laid her cheek upon it. I stole from the room.

It was evening when Benjamin Longmore, leaning over the balustrade, softly called my name. In the meantime, the doctor had visited us, and would not disturb Mrs. Longmore's slumber. He told me that the end was coming fast. I crept upstairs, and Benjamin Longmore took my hand, and whispering that he was afraid, led me into the room. Mrs. Longmore lay in the position in which I left her. She had not moved, except to release her husband's hand. Placid and beautiful was her face; there was no pain, no suffering in it; it symbolized peace and resignation.

"She lives still," I said.

"Will she pass away like that?" he asked. "What did the doctor say?"

"He bade us prepare. Hush!"

Mrs. Longmore stirred; her eyelids quivered, but she did not open her eyes; there was a movement of her lips. Benjamin Longmore laid his face close to hers.

"My dear husband!" she breathed, rather than said.

"I am here, darling."

"And Felicia?"

"Yes, my dear mistress."

"You have not kissed me, Felicia."

I put my lips to hers.

"When I was a child, my mother, who is waiting to receive me"—her voice was a little stronger, but her words came at intervals—"told me that Felicia means happiness. I never thought of it again, till just now in

a dream I saw my mother, and she said to me, 'Felicia—Happiness!' 'Yes, mother,' I answered, 'Felicia takes my place with our darling Gracie.' 'She will bring happiness to her,' my mother said. 'Come, my child. And she opened her arms to me, and in my sleep I fell asleep in her embrace. A dream within a dream. Dear husband, put your arms about me. Let me hear your voice.'

"Darling!"

"O, my dear, you must not grieve for me! Think of me as I soon shall be, in heaven waiting for you, as my mother is waiting for me; stretching out my arms for you, as hers are stretching out for me. It will be but a little while. Time is a breath. Remember, my dear husband, Felicia is to be always with our dear child."

"She shall be, always."

"Is it dark or light, dear?"

"Night is coming on," murmured Benjamin Longmore, in a voice of anguish.

"No, dear, no. Morning is coming. I feel, if I cannot see, the glow of sunrise. My blessing upon all in this house!"

Her head swayed gently to and fro, her hands moved slowly this way and that upon the counterpane. Gradually these motions ceased till all was still.

Thus did my beloved mistress pass away, and her face was as the face of an angel.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ANGEL LADY.

I REMEMBER that it was eight o'clock when I opened her desk and took out the envelope which she had addressed to me a few weeks before. I should not have been in such haste had I not thought there might be some instructions in her writing which needed early attention. This is what I found written on a sheet of paper upon which my name was again inscribed :

“DEAR FELICIA,—Some words spoken by the poor man we met in the Park on the last day I was able to walk out made a deep impression upon me, and I have pondered over them with a hope and a desire to give in some small way practical effect to them. You will remember the man—he told us his name was Macmillan. The words, my dear Felicia, were, ‘These expensive funerals, in poor or rich, are a woful mistake. Perhaps one day some part of the money wasted upon these exhibitions will be devoted to better purposes, to helping the poor, for instance.’ There is a beautiful lesson in his remarks, Felicia, and I have an earnest desire to show that it was not wasted upon me.

“I have not long to live. Let my death bring comfort and hope to a few poor people. I shall ask my dear husband to allow ten pounds of my darling Gracie’s money to be devoted to this purpose. He will consent and I am writing to you now partly to provide for a contingency that may occur, for our lives are not in our own hands. I may die suddenly, without warning, although it is my belief that I shall live till September. I would speak to my dear husband at once about my

desire, but I do not wish to inflict unnecessary pain upon him ; it is now June, and there are three months before September is here. To speak to him so long before I believe I shall be called would fill his heart with sorrow and pain for three long months.

“Dear Felicia, you will have ten pounds of my darling Gracie’s money, and perhaps, if you how these lines to my dear husband, he will gratify me by spending as little as possible upon my funeral, which I should like to be very simple, and will give you the money that is saved, to add to our child’s ten pounds. I want this money given to the poor people you know or may hear of, who are in want ; and then I shall feel that my death has brought comfort to some few poor homes. There is another wish I have. When you have decided how to bestow the money, take dear Gracie with you, and let her give it with her own pretty hands. Young as she is it may furnish her with a sweet memory ; and what task can there be more pleasant than to provide childhood with memories that may live in the mind with good effect in the future ? On a separate page I have written the names of those who appear to me most deserving—but you will be the best judge of that, and I trust entirely to your selection of those to whom the money is given.

“That is all I have to say, dear Felicia, except to thank you from my heart for all the love and kindness you have shown for me and my darling child. That you will be by her side to guide and counsel her as she grows to womanhood is my fervent hope. Good-bye, my dear.

“Your loving friend,

“ALICE LONGMORE.”

I examined the list of names she had prepared ; they were selected with great care and wisdom, and I resolved that I would carry out the wishes of my sainted mistress to the letter.

Whether rightly or wrongly I decided to show this paper at once to my master ; and I went down to him. Edward Ollier had been sent home to bed, and Philip Ollier was with his friend. Upon the table was a Bible, from which Philip Ollier had been reading. Benjamin Longmore's head was resting on his hand, and there was silence in the room when I entered.

I explained the reason of my intrusion, and gave the paper to my master. He looked at it, but the tears ran down his face when he saw his wife's handwriting.

"Read it, Phil," he said.

Philip Ollier read the sacred words in a hushed tone, his emotion causing him to pause many times during the perusal.

"O, my angel wife!" sobbed Benjamin Longmore as his friend put down the paper.

"Such bereavement may be a gain, Ben," said Philip Ollier solemnly.

"Do not say so," cried Benjamin Longmore. "You are cruel—cruel! Forgive me, Phil; I do not know what I am saying." When he was somewhat calmer he turned to me. "Her last wishes shall be obeyed, Miss Felicia."

"It is right, my dear master," I said.

"Yes," said Philip Ollier, "it is right."

I think it was about half an hour afterwards that one of the servants came to me, and said that a man had called at the house, and wished to see me.

"Did he give his name," I asked, "and say what he wanted?"

"No," replied the maid. "He asked first for Mrs. Longmore, and when I told him why he could not see her he seemed quite staggered and overpowered. Then he asked to see you."

"By name?" I inquired.

"He asked if Mrs. Longmore's lady friend was here, and he called you by your name, Miss Felicia. When I said you were in the house he told me to come to you with his message."

"Go and ask him what he wants," I said.

The maid went, and returned with an envelope upon which was written in pencil the name of John Macmillan. It was the man to whom my dear mistress had given a sovereign in the Park.

A word upon this subject. From the day my dear mistress had befriended him we had not seen or heard from him. I had often thought of his promise that the sovereign should be paid back, and I confess that I was disappointed at his silence. My dear mistress never spoke of him, and I did not introduce his name into our conversations, keeping my thoughts to myself, which, I frankly own, were not complimentary to him.

"There is no one in the dining-room?" I said to the maid.

"No, miss."

"Take him there, and say I will come to him."

Presently I joined him there. He stood with his cap in his hand, and there was a look of sorrow on his face. He was dressed exactly as we had seen him in the Park, the same clothes, more worn, of course, but distinguished by that remarkable tidiness and cleanliness which had attracted us on the occasion of our first meeting with him.

"I have come too late," he said, in a tone of true sympathy.

I nodded, and waited for him to continue.

“I should have been here before, but was not able until to-day to pay my debt, so I kept away. She is dead now, and thought me ungrateful.”

“It was not possible,” I said, “for her to harbor an unkind thought of any one in the world.”

“That I can well believe. I will not detain you long. It has taken me all this time to save what she lent to me.” He put a sovereign on the table. “I came to-night to pay and thank her.”

I gently pushed the sovereign towards him, saying “It is, as you said, too late,” and the moment I spoke the words I felt they were ill chosen.

“Not too late to pay my debt,” he said, doggedly, “but too late to thank her—to tell her that she has been the means of saving me and of giving me the opportunity to provide food for my child.” He pushed the sovereign back. “I should have come a couple of hours ago, but I waited till my child was asleep.” I noticed then that he had a paper, containing something, in his hand. He opened it, and laid a few flowers on the table. “I took my little girl into the country lanes to-day, knowing I was coming here to-night. She gathered these poor flowers herself, and asked me to take them to the angel lady, for that is how she speaks of the good woman who has gone to her rest. She does not know how true her words are. The angel lady!”

“May I venture to say that she would like you to keep this money to help you on? The flowers you have brought shall be laid on her coffin.”

“I should wish them to be laid there, and I am grateful to you. I was wrong in saying that she might think ill of me for not coming before. She could not, and she does not now—for she knows and sees. Let me tell

you what she did for me. She not only enabled me to get a living—and you will not be sorry to learn that during this past week my prospects have brightened—but she restored my faith. I was losing hope in God as I had lost hope in my fellow creatures. Her charity and mercy, no less than the influence of her presence, restored it to me, and the bitter thoughts which stirred me to rebellion have fled, never to return. I will take care, for her sake, whatever befalls, that it shall be as I say. Do you see the blessing that an unselfish act of goodness can confer upon a despairing man! I owe her something infinitely more precious than a mere piece of gold, you will acknowledge. Would that there were more angels on earth resembling her! As for the sovereign, I cannot take it back. Give it to the poor; it may lift another man up, as it has lifted me.”

I started; the sentiment he uttered was so truly in accord with the spirit which animated my dear mistress.

“Yes,” I said, putting the piece of gold in my purse. “It shall be bestowed as you wish. Perhaps you would like to know that you have been the means of doing good, and that some words you have spoken to her have blossomed into flower.”

“*I* have been the means of doing good!” he exclaimed in wonder. It was due to him that he should be made acquainted with Mrs. Longmore’s last wishes. I recognized in him an exceptional man, and I felt any trust reposed in him would not be misplaced. He had met in my dear mistress an angel of mercy and sweetness, and we met in him a man of sterling worth.

“Remain here a moment,” I said.

I went to the room in which the two friends were sitting and asked Benjamin Longmore to let me have his wife’s last testament, saying I would bring it back to him.

"It is yours, Miss Felicia," he said. "I think I could repeat it, word for word."

With the paper in my hand I returned to Mr. Macmillan, and bade him read it. His eyes moistened and his hands trembled as he perused this sacred message from her who was lying in death's embrace in the room above.

"It is wonderful," he said, "wonderful and beautiful as a page from the Book of God. I am humbly, humbly grateful, but the goodness sprang from her heart, not from mine. Miss Felicia, should I ever be tempted to do wrong I will think of this. She spoke of her child," he said, after a pause, "a little girl of the same age as my Mary. She called her Grace. How is she?"

"She knows nothing," I said; "she is too young to realize her loss."

"There are inherited virtues. May she grow up as her mother did."

"Amen!" I said.

I saw that he felt that his visit had reached its proper termination; and yet he lingered.

"Is there anything more you wish to say?" I asked, with the intention of assisting him out of his embarrassment.

"There is a favor," he replied, "I hardly dare to ask; and even if you were willing you might not be able to grant it."

"I cannot say till I know what it is."

"Is there in the house," he said, timidly, "any old portrait of Mrs. Longmore that you could spare? Never mind how old and faded it is, I should regard it as an inestimable obligation."

It happened to be in my power to give him what he desired. In July, in accordance with a wish expressed

by my dear mistress, Benjamin Longmore had engaged the services of a photographer who, making his preparations in the garden, had taken portraits of Gracie and her father and of Philip and Edward Ollier, singly and in groups, in one of the latter in which I was invited to take a place. My dear mistress was sitting at her window, which faced the garden, watching the operation, and Benjamin Longmore, suddenly looking up at her, whispered a few words to the photographer, who looked up also, and nodded. Benjamin Longmore told me what was in his mind, and I ran indoors to his wife, and rearranged the flowers on the sill, so that her face, upon which the light was shining, might be clearly seen. I informed her of her husband's wish and she smilingly consented. The result was a most charming picture of my dear mistress, from which a number of copies had been struck.

"You shall have a portrait," I said to Mr. Macmillan, and went up to my room and got it for him.

He gazed at it long and reverently, and wrapping it carefully in paper, put it into his pocket. I accompanied him into the passage which led to the street door, and I noticed that he cast a look at the stairs. His wistful eyes were not to be resisted.

"Come upstairs," I whispered: "Tread softly."

We stood in the room in which the dear angel was lying, and in which I had lit some candles. Her face was upturned; her hands were folded on the counterpane; she looked like one who had fallen into a sweet sleep. Mr. Macmillan sank upon his knees and kissed the white covering, and just touched with his lips the lovely hands. Then he rose, and bowing his head to me, went softly downstairs, and bidding me good night, left the house.

On the day of the funeral he was in the churchyard with his little child, and when the coffin was lowered he and his daughter dropped some flowers into the grave.

And so my beloved mistress was laid to rest.

CHAPTER X.

GRANDMAMMA LONGMORE'S PECULIARITIES BECOME MORE MARKED.

IN recounting these, the most pathetic experiences in my life, I have said nothing of Grandmamma Longmore, for the reason that she was not with us during my dear mistress's illness. She lived in the country, and being at that time herself unwell, her son enjoined her not to come to London. But two or three days after we had followed the last remains of the dear one to the churchyard, Grandmamma Longmore made her appearance, and took up her residence in the house. She had lived all alone, having lost her husband some years since, and it was natural and proper that she should come to live with the only relatives she had in the world.

I think that Grandmamma Longmore was at first inclined to rebel against the authority with which I was invested, for I had the entire control of the domestic establishment. It was certainly only an impression, for the rebellion, if it existed at all, was not an open one, but I may be pardoned for saying that my impressions are generally correct. Either way her dislike of my dominion did not last very long; she found herself well cared for and looked after, and her special

tastes in all matters were anticipated by me. This being the case she probably deemed it best for her own convenience and comfort, to say nothing of the ease it brought her, to acknowledge me as the nominal mistress of the household. Indeed, after a time we became very good friends, and I was particularly careful not to do the least thing that might wound the old lady's dignity. Grace was solely in my charge, and as I had received a sound education I was well fitted to look after hers.

I must not omit to mention that a scrupulous account was kept of the small expense of my dear mistress's funeral and of what it would have cost had it not been for her last wishes. This account was made out by Philip Ollier, who took upon himself all the arrangements for the funeral, and on the day after the sad ceremony he handed to me the sum of twenty-six pounds. This, with the ten pounds I received from Grace's money and the sovereign Mr. Macmillan had paid me, made thirty-seven pounds—which enabled me to do a great deal of good. There is no reason why I should enter into the details of this expenditure. Suffice it to say that it was well bestowed, and that with a portion of it I assisted a poor and deserving family to emigrate to Australia. In after years I was surprised and gratified to receive from the head of this poor family various small drafts, amounting in all to three times the sum he had received from me, or rather from Grace, for it was her little hands that gave the money away. He had worked and prospered; from the day he set foot upon Australian shores he and his family had never known want, and he is now a well-to-do man, master of his own house and land. It is a great pleasure to know that my dear mistress's last

wishes bore such good fruit, and if her example is followed by others this simple story will not have been written in vain.

For some months after my dear mistress was taken from us there was much sadness in Benjamin Longmore's house, but gradually cheerfulness crept in and took firm hold, and for many years the home was very happy. The disquieting thoughts I had been troubled with because of Benjamin Longmore's idea of the value of money were lulled and forgotten. It will presently be my duty to record how in after years they sprang into fierce life, and brought unhappiness in their train. Meanwhile, however, the tide of existence flowed calmly on. All Philip Ollier's leisure time was spent in his friend's house, and I scarcely remember the occasion when he came unaccompanied by his son Ned. The loss we had sustained seemed to strengthen the links which bound these friends together; they seemed to rely more and more upon each other; and many were the happy evenings we enjoyed listening to their conversation and to their pleasant recalling of their boyish reminiscences. Whenever we heard the words, "Do you remember, Ben?" or "Do you remember, Phil?" our attention was immediately enlisted in what was to follow. Then they would speak of their boyish freaks, their enjoyments, their aspirations, and we would listen in quiet delight to the hearty voices of these friends who in their manhood strengthened the links which had bound them in their youth.

Philip Ollier also held the position of manager in a city house, but his salary, I understood, was not more than one-third of Benjamin Longmore's, and it was therefore incumbent upon him to be exceedingly careful in his expenditure in order to maintain an appear-

ance of respectability. When I learned what his emoluments were I knew why he was educating his son himself; he could not afford to engage a tutor for Ned, or put him to a good school. The education of children is a very serious matter with persons in the middle class of life.

It is to be doubted, however, whether in any school or under any tutors, Ned Ollier could have been better taught than he was by his father. He was one of those lads who require but gentle directing in the path of knowledge, who pick up things for themselves and need no spurring, and when he reached manhood he was proficient in everything that was necessary for the conduct of life, either in a high or low station. With gentlemen who had received a college education he could hold his own, and he had a keen appreciation and understanding of the wants and requirements of those who moved in the lower strata. A keen sympathy, also, as events proved later on. Sometimes he reminded me of Mr. Macmillan; he had opinions, by which I felt he would stand in any circumstances, with a light regard as to whether the expression of them would bring him into favor or disfavor. He seldom put himself forward, but there were occasions when he would assert himself with a thorough independence, and, as usual, with a thorough disregard of consequences. Although, as I have indicated, his sympathies were with the lower classes, Ned Ollier was very much of a gentleman, even as a lad; he could be stately and dignified, as he was honorable and straightforward. He was incapable of meanness, and a blow in the face would have been preferable to him than to doubt his word. The blow he could have returned, and would, for he had a sturdy courage of his own, but the doubt

would have sent the hot, indignant blood rushing to his face and brows, and deprived him of the power, perhaps the inclination, to defend himself.

The business duties of Benjamin Longmore and Philip Ollier calling them from home for the greater part of the day, Ned would have been left very much alone had it not been for our house. It was the usual thing for him to make his appearance at about eleven o'clock, and remain with us till five, when he would scud home to meet his father, who was due from the city at six o'clock. Then, after dinner—if they did not dine with us, which they did about one day in three—they would generally come around again and remain with us till half-past nine, when they would take their departure. I often thought what a lonely life theirs would have been if it had not been for the ties which existed between them and Benjamin Longmore, and I was genuinely glad that such a house as my master's was open to them. This disposition of their time afforded Ned an opportunity of accompanying Grace and me on our weekly visits of charity to the poorer parts of the city, and thus early they became familiar with matters of which the children of well-to-do people but very rarely have the slightest knowledge. Benjamin Longmore never interfered with us, and never uttered a word against our proceedings. We were carrying out the wishes of the dear lady who had brought into his home its sweetest influences, and I thoroughly believe that it never entered his mind to dispute them, or to do anything to weaken them. As thoroughly do I believe that he had not the slightest sympathy with our movements. He had, indeed, so far as any action on his part could be taken as a criterion, no sympathy for the poor. His may have been because he did not think of them, because perhaps he

was blind to certain signs around him. For some little while after my dear mistress's death I would say to him :

“Would you like to see sir, how the charity money is being disposed of?” Having papers and figures ready to show how his wife's bequest was being administered.

His answer would be, “No, Miss Felicia, I have other things to attend to ; I am perfectly satisfied that you are doing what is right.”

Had he said that he took no interest in the matter, and that that was the reason why he would not examine the figures, it would have been more correct. But he gave me the money regularly, on the first of every month, in advance, and it would have been presumption on my part to have endeavored to force him to show an interest in a matter which did not in any sense appeal to him.

Meanwhile, as may be imagined with two such children, the feelings which existed between Grace and Ned became firmer as time went on ; their happiest hours were spent in each other's company, and I, knowing the wish which my dear mistress had entertained, neglected no means to cement their mutual affection.

Our home was not entirely a serious home ; I am impelled to make this remark because I feel that I am writing somewhat seriously—which may be because I am by nature rather serious, and because I am writing by the light of later events. We had games, we had music, we had a fair share of fun and gaiety. Sometimes we all went to the theatre together—not Grandmamma Longmore, she was too old—and twice a-year we went to the Crystal Palace. Christmas was always a happy time with us, although we had to be very careful of the simple gifts of remembrance that were exchanged

because of Grandmamma Longmore's growing propensity to carry off everything of small value upon which she could lay her hands unaware. With increasing years Grandmamma Longmore's peculiarities in this respect became more marked, but so extraordinarily astute and careful was she—I don't like to use the word "cunning," but after all it might be the proper word—that we never once detected her in these pilfering actions.

"Grandmamma," Grace would say, "what a pretty Christmas card you sent me!"

"I thought it was pretty, Grace."

"It was the one with the doves, grandmamma, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Grace, with two white doves. Let me look at it again."

"But, grandmamma, it is gone."

"Gone, child! Nonsense!"

"I put it on the mantelshelf," said Grace, "and left the room just for one little minute, and when I came back it was gone. Now, who could have taken it?"

"Ah," said Grandmamma Longmore, putting on her consideringcap, "who?"

"You don't know, do you, grandmamma?"

"I, child! What an idea! Perhaps it was the cat."

"O, grandmamma! The cat!"

"Why not, child? The doves looked very real, and cats are fond of birds."

It was useless to pursue the inquiry; the card was gone, and there was no recovering it. Grandmamma Longmore did not take important things, that was one comfort only little things; and if we had any small article of special value we were very careful to keep it out of her clutches.

The one party we gave every year was given a few days after Christmas. It was a children's party, to strip the Christmas tree, and the jolly time the children had was something to remember. Benjamin Longmore was always present, of course, but he did not take an active part in the proceedings, the life and soul of which was Philip Ollier, who, on those occasions, was more boy than man. It was on the day following one of these merry gatherings that a notable incident occurred, which may fitly here be related, especially as some sort of binding engagement was entered into between Benjamin Longmore and Edward Ollier—though one was a mature man and the other a very young lad—with respect to Grace.

CHAPTER XI.

NED OLLIER MAKES A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE, AND GIVES A PROMISE.

I CANNOT say whether what occurred was the result of a secret understanding between Ned and Grace; neither of them ever told me it was, but I had my own ideas on the subject. Perhaps it was some story they read together which led to the idea that the time had arrived when an open declaration of intentions ought to be made.

Grace, always very sweet and pretty, looked especially so at this year's Christmas party, and was much courted by the little boys who were present. Unlike most very young ladies, and perhaps as many somewhat older, Grace was not a flirt, and she did not contribute to the breaking of Ned's heart by showing any special favor to the young cavaliers who thronged

around her with a decided inclination for stolen kisses. The disclosure may here be made that Grace, early in the year of this Christmas, had exhibited poetic proclivities, and had burst forth into verse. She had received a valentine from Ned, which so stirred her that she went straightway into a corner and composed a poem to her sweetheart, the first verse of which ran as follows:

“My heart did never beat before,
As it did beat just now,
I want you but to keep to me,
And I'll give my hand to thou.”

What boy in the world could have resisted a surrender so complete?

Well, it was the day following the Christmas party, or rather on the evening following it, that Ned, in defiance of established usage, made his declaration in the presence of all assembled in the cosy sitting-room.

Grandmamma Longmore was dozing, or pretending to doze, I was busy with my needle, Grace and Ned were sitting in a corner, probably debating the very subject which was to be disclosed to us, and Benjamin Longmore and Philip Ollier were fighting a battle over the draught board.

Suddenly Ned rose, and going close to the two gentlemen said abruptly.

“Mr. Longmore, I want to marry Gracie.”

The friends looked up from the draught board, much amused and astonished, and Grandmamma Longmore, all at once very wide awake, and cried:

“What! What!”

I stopped in my work, and turned towards the group, with a smile on my lips.

“Say that again, Ned,” said Benjamin Longmore.

Ned, without the slightest hesitation, repeated:

“I want to marry Gracie.”

“This is serious, Phil,” said Benjamin Longmore, pushing away the board. “The game’s yours. I don’t know why I made that ridiculous move; other things in my head. So”—to Ned, “you want to marry Gracie?”

“Yes, sir,” said Ned.

“And you, Gracie?” to his daughter.

“It is all settled, papa,” said Gracie, without a blush on her face. “We have been engaged ever so long.”

“That being the case,” said Benjamin Longmore to Philip Ollier, “we have very little to say in the matter.” Philip Ollier smiled, but there was something thoughtful in the smile which struck me. “Marriage, Ned,” continued Benjamin Longmore, “is a rather serious affair.”

“We know that, papa,” said Grace, who had risen and was now standing by Ned’s side, “and we are serious.”

“Really and truly, Grace?”

“Really and truly, papa.”

“But what are you going to marry upon, Ned?” asked Benjamin Longmore.

Ned looked rather puzzled at this, but he brightened up immediately, and answered:

“Why, upon this carpet, sir.”

Grandmamma Longmore burst into an immoderate fit of laughter, declaring in the midst of it that those children would be the death of her, which afterwards became rather a favorite declaration when she was tickled by their proceedings.

“If you have settled it between you,” said Benjamin Longmore, “why do you ask for my consent?”

Ned considered a moment, and then replied: "No gentleman would marry another gentleman's daughter without asking the other gentleman's consent."

This sent Grandmamma Longmore into another fit of laughter, recovering from which she observed,

"A very proper remark, Miss Felicia, really a very proper remark. That boy has sense beyond his years."

"What do you say, Phil?" asked Benjamin Longmore.

"What do *you* say, Ben?" asked Philip Ollier, treating the matter lightly, as of course, we all did, but still with the thoughtful manner which had struck me at first.

This thoughtfulness seemed to attract Benjamin Longmore's observation.

"No gentleman," he said, repeating Ned's words, "would marry another gentleman's daughter without the other gentleman's consent."

"Certainly not, sir," said Ned.

"Is that your opinion too, Grace?"

"O, yes, papa. I say whatever Ned says."

"The question is," said Benjamin Longmore, "whether Ned, when he is a man, will hold to that opinion. Because, although you might be married now as boy and girl, you would have to be married all over again as man and woman."

"Should we, papa?"

"Undoubtedly, Grace. I have no objection to this preliminary marriage if you and Ned will hold to what you say."

"We will hold to it, sir," said Ned, adding rather loftily, "I never go back from my word."

"What do you say to that, Grace?"

"I agree with Ned," said Grace, comprehensively, "in everything."

“So be it,” said Benjamin Longmore. “We agree. Eh, Phil?”

“Yes, Ben.”

Upon that the children went back to their corner with a settled conviction that they had just gone through a very solemn ceremony.

The next day Grace went to her money box and emptied it. Benjamin Longmore gave his daughter sixpence a-week, about half of which she spent upon herself and her innocent fancies, such as buying birthday cards and birthday gifts of her own choosing for her father and grandmamma Longmore and I; the other half was allowed to accumulate in her box.

“Help me to count it, Miss Felicia.”

The little piles of copper and silver amounted to nineteen shillings.

“That will be enough to commence with, Miss Felicia, won’t it?” she asked.

“To commence what with, Grace?”

“Housekeeping,” she replied, quite gravely. “I must invite Ned to dinner, and I must get a cooking stove.”

So we went out, and with her nineteen shillings purchased a child’s cooking stove and a cookery book to match, with which Grace began her lessons in housekeeping. The meals which, with my assistance, she prepared, were not very substantial, but they were enjoyed as children enjoy such things, and the time was not thrown away. It gave her, at all events, a taste for such matters, which was likely to be profitable in the future; in addition to which it was fair amusement for the days of childhood.

There is no need for me to dwell longer upon these early years in the lives of Grace and Ned. The prom-

ise of beauty in our dear girl was fulfilled. She grew straight and lovely as a lily—a fitting simile, for her soul, as well as her body, was the emblem of purity. In the best sense of the word, Grace was becoming a lady, as Ned was becoming a gentleman—lady and gentleman, I mean, in true feeling, not in fine ladies and gentlemen's ways. In all respects they were showing themselves to be what I, their dear and true friend, would have had them to be, such as, if they were my own children, I would have had them to be. I pass, therefore, over the intervening years until Ned was twenty-one and Grace nearly seventeen years of age. Philip Ollier had found a situation for his son in a mercantile office, not a very lucrative situation, nor one which offered much promise for the future. Ned's salary was a hundred a-year, and upon that and what his father earned they rubbed along pretty comfortably. The children's liking for each other was developing into a stronger feeling. I, who watched them with wisdom and affection, saw that clearly. They loved each other, but Ned had not spoken, and if he had seriously reviewed his position with any idea of matrimony he must have known that he could not offer to Grace such a home as he would have wished her to occupy.

CHAPTER XII.

IT WAS YOUR MOTHER'S FONDEST WISH.

How did the trouble commence? In what way did the beautiful link between friend and friend begin to grow weaker? Instead of indulging in speculation it will be best to narrate actual facts and occurrences.

The firm in which Philip Ollier was employed fell into difficulties. It was spoken of one night when we were all together.

"Things are going badly at the office," said Philip Ollier.

"In what way!" asked Benjamin Longmore, not with the interest he would have exhibited of old, but in a lukewarm manner.

Philip Ollier, however, did not appear to notice this.

"Business has been falling off for some time," he replied. "There is a talk of retrenchment. Two clerks who have been with us twenty years have received notice."

Benjamin Longmore nodded carelessly, and remarked: "Changes must come, of course."

"It seems hard, Ben."

"I don't know so much about that. Some must go to the wall." Then, as if a deeper show of interest was expected of him he asked, "Have you any idea of the cause of the trouble?"

"The young members of the firm have been speculating rashly outside their business."

“O,” said Benjamin Longmore, “speculating. But how are people to make money if they don’t speculate.”

“There is the steady road, Ben ; it is the easiest and pleasantest.”

“That is one view. The easiest and pleasantest thing is to make money.”

“Do you mean to make money anyhow ?”

“No, I don’t mean anyhow,” said Benjamin Longmore, with irritation. “I mean by shrewdness, by watching the markets, by taking advantage of opportunities.”

Philip Ollier did not pursue the subject ; he felt, as I did, the lack of sympathy in his old friend.

These few words strengthened if it did not confirm an impression which had forced itself upon me that Benjamin Longmore was stepping out of his regular groove. In which direction, I did not then know, but I had a suspicion that it was in the direction of speculation for the purpose of striving to make money.

On another occasion Philip Ollier said sadly :

“The fears I have entertained have become a certainty. Our firm is breaking up. There is a talk of the creditors being called together. Some of our bills have been returned.”

“What do you intend to do ?” asked Benjamin Longmore.

“Heaven knows. If the worst happens I shall be thrown on my beam ends. I don’t exactly see what I am fitted for after so long a service. A bad feature in the affair is that I have not been able to save anything.”

“Nothing ?”

“Not a shilling. I owe nothing, that is one comfort. I am greatly worried about Ned. I hoped to be able

to do something for him. I am afraid now he will have to depend entirely upon himself."

"Well, we had to do the same."

"Times are changed, said Philip Ollier sadly. "Once there was a fair likelihood of a man obtaining a situation if he was fitted for it. Now there are a hundred applicants ready to rush into any chance opening. If I were a younger man I should emigrate."

"You might do worse even now," said Benjamin Longmore.

Not so would he have spoken in bygone years at the prospect of a separation with his friend ; he would have been ready to offer sympathy and counsel, to suggest this and that.

"Yes," said Philip Ollier, thoughtfully, "I might do worse even now. I have my health and strength, thank God, but the breaking of old ties is a wrench. The castles we built when we were boys were air-built castles in very truth."

"I have not said farewell to mine," observed Benjamin Longmore.

"Why, do you cling to them still?"

"Of course I do."

"I envy you ; mine have faded long ago. Do you remember 'Mon Repos,' Ben?"

"I never forget it. I made up my mind to be its master one day, and one day I shall be."

Philip Ollier stared at his old friend, and said, "You were always tenacious. I remember at school how you stuck to any opinion you expressed, whether you were right or wrong."

"The mastiff quality," said Benjamin Longmore, "yes, I am not ashamed of it. I wasn't cut out for a weathercock. Before I die I shall realize all my wishes ;

and as for dying, I have a good many years before me yet. I am still a young man, only forty-two; I have the advantage of you by two years."

"You have the advantage of me in every way," said Philip Ollier, somewhat sadly; "you have more spirit, more pluck, more determination. However," and his voice grew more cheerful, "it will never do to despond. I have plenty to be thankful for. There's Ned, as fine and honorable a lad as you would meet within a day's march. Is it nothing to have a son like him? Is it nothing to know that you have such a brave, true heart to depend upon? We are going to have some fine times in the future; the sun hasn't done shining yet."

"Of course it hasn't," said Benjamin Longmore. "It all rests with ourselves. If you walk about with a despondent face, if you tell your friends that times are hard with you, all that they will say is, 'O, he's going to the dogs.' Just the same if you're not feeling well, and if every time you're asked how you are you answer, 'I feel very bad,' all your friends will say, 'It's quite plain what is the matter with him; he's breaking up.' Never cry 'Wolf,' Phil."

There were present at this conversation only the two friends and myself, and I was quite glad to hear Benjamin Longmore say "Phil." Philip Ollier had addressed his friend a good many times by the old familiar name "Ben," and it had jarred upon me that my master seemed to purposely avoid a reciprocal cordiality. It cheered Philip Ollier up, too.

"That is sound philosophy, Ben," he said, "but I don't think I give way before anybody but you—and our good friend, Miss Felicia," he added with a smile. "I know something of the world, though I've not

studied it as deeply as you have done. Thank you for your advice, old fellow ; I'll profit by it, and nobody shall see me with anything but a cheerful face. By the way, Ben, you give me an impression that things are brightening with you."

"Do I?" asked Benjamin Longmore, and there was something secretive in his tone and manner.

"Yes, and I sincerely hope that my impression is correct."

"Well," said Benjamin Longmore, and I now detected a kind of boastfulness in his voice, "I am not going to the bad, at all events."

"Which means that you are on the other road," said Philip Ollier.

"Well, yes, if you like."

"I heartily congratulate you. I shall live to see you ride in your carriage."

"Of that," said Benjamin Longmore, "I haven't very much doubt."

At this point Grace and Ned entered the room, and the conversation came to an end. Their faces shone with a new tenderness, and a glad hope animated me. It had been inexpressibly painful to me to observe the weakening of the sweet tie of friendship between the fathers of these young people. In my judgment of the affairs of life it did not need that I should be told such and such a thing in so many words ; I judged generally by signs, and the signs that were presented and were visible to me in the intercourse of the two old friends foretold a break between them. One of the most conspicuous of these signs was the dropping of the song they so often used to sing, "When we were boys together." For quite twelve months past it had not been started by either of them, and I missed it

sadly. I do not know if the other members and friends of the household missed it as I did, and whether they drew the same conclusions as myself. Grandmamma Longmore thought of little else than herself and the passing hour, and the unexpressed love which existed between Grace and Ned prevented them from seeing what I saw ; for love, as well as old age, is in its way selfish and all-absorbing. If I were right in my foreboding of an impending break in the long friendship of Benjamin Longmore and Philip Ollier, how would it be with Grace and Ned ? My reflections in that direction did not add to my cheerfulness, and I could not imagine any sadder occurrence than the separation of these two young people because of the separation of their parents, to whom they owed both love and duty. But now, as they came into the room my face, my heart grew brighter. Something had passed between them. What ? That it was something sweet and good, something that gladdened them as it gladdened me, was certain ; and I burned to learn the truth. It was disclosed to me before I went to bed.

Grace and I occupied adjoining bedrooms, between which there was a communicating door, and it was our habit to converse for half an hour or so before we bade each other good-night. It was a favorite occupation of mine during this half hour to do Grace's hair, which was very long and beautiful, and she allowed me to so employ myself because she knew it afforded me pleasure. So on this night I brushed the brown tresses, and peeping over Grace's shoulder saw her smiling happily to herself. I bent forward and kissed her, and said :

“ Have you anything to tell me, Gracie ? ”

She blushed as she answered; "Yes, but I don't know how to commence."

"Wait a moment, darling."

I finished my task, and drawing a chair close to the lovely girl, I said :

"Well, Gracie?"

What did she do but clasp me round the neck and hide her face on my shoulder?

"Is it about Ned, darling?"

"Yes."

The whisper of a rose could scarcely have been softer and sweeter.

"Has he spoken, darling?"

"Yes."

"Now," I said, with a tender caress, "tell me what he said, and how it came about."

"That is the hardest part, dear Miss Felicia," Grace whispered. "I don't know, and I don't think Ned could tell you. It was all so sudden, and it was through an other person, not through ourselves. We met Mrs. Anderson, or rather Mrs. Anderson met us for we did not see her till she came up to us."

"Yes, Gracie."

I may mention here that the Mrs. Anderson she referred to was a poor woman whom we had befriended. She was a young woman but twelve months married when we first came across her. Her husband had met with an accident, and was in the hospital, and she had been left penniless, with a young baby to care for. By our help she managed to tide over evil times, and when her husband was well enough to leave the hospital we had been fortunate enough to obtain a situation for him. They had had a hard struggle, but had battled bravely on, and now they were about to emigrate, a friend in

New Zealand having sent them, in answer to an appeal they had made to him, a sum sufficient to pay their passage across. It was this good news that the grateful woman, seeing Grace, hastened to communicate to her.

"She spoke so beautifully," Grace said, "and hoped you would come and see her. Their ship sails to-morrow week. She had the letter in her pocket, and she read part of it to me. Their friend in Australia is in a good way of business, and they are going out to a situation in his store. He is a single gentleman, and he offers Mr. Anderson two pounds a-week, and fifteen shillings a-week to Mrs. Anderson if she will do the cooking. Of course she is going to do it, and their friend says in his letter that in three or four years they will be able to save money enough to set up business for themselves if they wish to leave him then. She declares, dear Miss Felicia, that if it hadn't been for us this good fortune would never have happened to them, for it was you who advised and persuaded her to write to their friend. She is so grateful, and she cried as she told us all about it. And then she said, looking at me and Ned, that she hoped we would be as happy as we had made her. That was the commencement of it, and when she went away, sending her blessing to you, dear Miss Felicia, I was crying, too, because of the beautiful way she spoke. I cannot tell you exactly what happened after that. Ned and I were very quiet for a little while, and then Ned said something, and I answered him, and he told me he loved me, and—O, my dear second mother, how shall I say it—I told him that I loved him. Was it wrong? Tell me, tell me, dear Miss Felicia."

"You spoke out of your heart, darling," I said, wiping my eyes, "and you did what was right. It was

your mother's fondest wish that you and Ned should be to each other what you have promised to be."

"Was it, dear Miss Felicia, was it! O, how happy Ned will be to hear it! My darling mother told you so, though I was so young when she was taken from us? What a happiness, what a happiness that her wish—and ours, dear Miss Felicia, our dearest, our only wish—should be fulfilled!"

Then, searching my memory, I recalled all that had been said by my dear mistress about Grace and Ned, and the happy girl listened with folded hands and a rapt expression on her lovely face.

"She had the highest opinion of Ned, dear Grace. The last time he saw her, when she bade him farewell, knowing she had not long to live—hush, my darling, hush! it was God's will, and your honored mother was resigned—she said to him that he and you were in the playtime of life, and that bye and bye he would be a man and you a woman; and that it was then she wanted him to be true to you. He answered that he would never be anything else."

"He has been, he will be, dear Miss Felicia."

"I am sure of it."

"My dear, good mother!"

"She had a great wish, Gracie, to dream of your future, and she used to go to sleep praying that she might see it in her dreams. Before she bade farewell to your Ned——"

"Yes, dear Miss Felicia, to my Ned. My Ned!"

"Her wish was gratified. Waking from a sleep she told me that she saw you a bright and beautiful woman, and that Ned was with you. 'It will be, dear Felicia,' she said to me; 'it is a message from heaven!' And

now, at this moment, dear child, she sees you, and rejoices."

Grace sank to her knees, and I did not disturb her, but looked down upon her beautiful form, my heart throbbing with gratitude. Presently she rose and nestled close to me.

"Ned is going to speak to papa to-morrow," she said.

My mind was troubled a little as I said, "It is proper that he should do so, dear."

"What worries Ned," she continued, "is his position. He is not earning much, but we can wait."

"Yes, dear, you are both young. You can wait for two or three years till Ned is in a better position."

"Do you know what he said, Miss Felicia, after it—was—all—settled?" The prettiest blush accompanied these words as they dropped slowly from her lips. "That he was afraid he had done wrong in speaking to me so soon, and that if he had thought properly of it he would have held his tongue. I had to chide him for that, and I told him—I hope it was not bold—that he should think of me as well as of himself. He said he was always thinking of me, and that it was for my sake he ought to have left it till next year, or the year after, when he saw his way to provide a home for us. You will be with us, will you not, Miss Felicia!"

"If you wish it, dear."

"I do wish it, and so does Ned. And then he corrected himself, and said he was glad, after all, that he *had* spoken when he did, because somebody else might have stepped in, and he would be too late. As if anybody could! As if I would have listened to any one else!"

And so the dear child went on till I told her it was

time for her to get to bed. She obeyed me, but begged me not to leave her till she was quite tired out. I sat by her bedside, and we talked a little longer, and then she fell asleep with a smile on her lips.

Kissing her softly, I retired to my room, and began to think.

Sometimes during my musings I buoyed myself up with the thought that all would end right, and that this new bond between the children would restore the old harmonious bond between their parents. Then I was worried by the remembrance of Benjamin Longmore's coldness towards Philip Ollier, by his lack of sympathy in his friend's approaching trials, by his selfish engrossment of his own schemes and desires. I was tossed this way and that, now seeing nothing but light, now seeing nothing but darkness. I debated how Benjamin Longmore would receive the declaration which Ned was to make on the morrow, and at one moment I was joyful, the next despondent. I took myself to task.

"You are very proud of your powers of observation, Felicia," I said, "you think yourself very clever in getting at the heart of things without anything being said. You have an intuition, truly, a fine intuition which makes you look on the gloomy side. How do you know what is passing in the mind of your master, who was a good husband to his wife, who is a good father to his child? Hope for the best, Felicia, hope for the best."

I stole into Gracie's room; she had not stirred, and the happy smile was still on her lips. So I crept into bed, and fell asleep, too, hoping for the best.

CHAPTER XIII.

POOR NED.

It happened on the next morning that my master, of his own free will, afforded me an insight of what was passing in his mind. He called me to his study, in which he was in the habit of writing his private letters, and locked the door.

"I wish to speak to you," he commenced, "upon a particular subject."

I held my breath. Was it about Grace and Ned? He continued:

"You will please to keep to yourself what passes between us. I must exact that promise from you."

"It is given, sir," I said.

"You will not divulge it to any friend of mine, not even to my daughter."

"I promise you, sir."

"I am satisfied with your word. From my long experience of you I know you are to be thoroughly trusted. The subject, Miss Felicia, is money."

"You are in no difficulty, I hope sir."

"Not at all. It is the other way. It is not the losing of money, but the making of it, I am about to speak of. You are good at figures?"

"Yes, sir."

It was indeed one of my few special gifts; I was something more than a good arithmetician, I was a clever one.

“What I shall impart to you,” he said, “will come as a revelation. I need a secretary to make up certain accounts from time to time, under my direction, and to verify such accounts as I shall myself make out, in order to prevent mistakes. I wish you to undertake this duty.”

“I am entirely at your service, sir.”

“This new duty may render it necessary that another female should be engaged in the house who will look after matters to which you have hitherto given your attention—household matters, I mean. You can engage such a person.”

“I must not be taken from Grace, sir.”

“There will be no need for that; you will continue to be to her what you have always been, a wise friend and companion. Miss Felicia, you will be surprised to hear that I am bent upon becoming a rich man, and that I set the greatest possible value upon—Money.”

I make a break before his present utterance of the word because he did so himself, and I put a capital M to it because he spoke it with emphasis.

I was not at all surprised at the revelation; any surprise I may have felt was caused by his ignorance of my knowledge of him. He had entirely ignored my intuitive powers and my faculty of observation.

“Yes, Miss Felicia, upon money. During the last twelve months certain opportunities of speculation have been presented to me, and I have in a small way taken advantage of them. Before very long I hope to take advantage of these opportunities in a larger way. Of course you are ignorant of these matters, and therefore I do not seek your advice concerning them; all I seek is your assistance in the manipulation of figures, under my direction. You are willing?”

He was my master ; he could command my services but not for those reasons alone did I immediately reply that I was willing. There was a wish in my mind to become acquainted with his movements in the direction he directed, and a latent hope that my knowledge of them might be turned to favorable advantage for those I best loved.

“To speak plainly,” he said, “I am engaged in speculation in stocks and shares, and I want certain tables prepared from week to week which will be a guide to me in my operations.”

He then set before me a number of cuttings from newspapers, all referring to fluctuations in the stock and share markets, and he further explained to me that one part of my new duties was to make similar cuttings from newspapers which he had ordered to be sent to the house, and to paste and arrange them in a book side by side, for the purposes of study and comparison. I soon understood his directions, and was satisfied that I could properly carry them out. I was satisfied of another thing as well—that he had already made money, and that his desire to become the master of the grand house and estate known as “*Mon Repos*” was not such a wild idea as I had hitherto supposed it to be, given, of course, that it was ever thrown into the market.

Matters being thus far advanced in our interview he was about to dismiss me when we heard a knock at the door. He opened it, and a servant said that Mr. Edward Ollier had asked to see him.

“I will leave you now, sir,” I said, with a prayer in my heart that Ned’s errand might have a successful issue.

“No,” said Benjamin Longmore, “remain.”

If I had thought that expostulation would have availed me I should have said that he had better see Ned alone, but there was that in my master's tone which compelled obedience. So I remained, unwillingly.

"Can I speak to you alone, Mr. Longmore?" said Ned, upon his entrance.

"You can say what you have to say before Miss Felicia," was Benjamin Longmore's reply to this request.

"I should like to say it privately, sir," urged poor Ned.

"I have nothing private from Miss Felicia," said Benjamin Longmore.

My heart fell; it was not in this way he used to speak to Ned. It used to be "Ned, my boy," or "Well, Ned?" or some hearty prompting of that kind, but now there was no cordiality in voice or manner.

"It is about Grace, sir," said Ned, feeling the coldness as I felt it.

"O, about Grace," said Benjamin Longmore. "Be seated, Miss Felicia. Well?"

He did not even ask Ned to take a chair.

"I told her last night," said Ned, "that I would come and speak to you."

How I pitied the young fellow. At the best, it was a nervous errand upon which he had come, but Benjamin Longmore's reception of him made his task a hundred times more difficult.

"Yes," said Benjamin Longmore, with displeasure in his eyes, "you told her last night that you were coming to speak to me. What did my daughter say to that?"

"That it would be right for me to do so."

"Go on," said Benjamin Longmore coldly.

The young fellow drew a long breath, straightened himself, and spoke now manfully as well as modestly.

“We love each other, sir.”

Benjamin Longmore had turned his face from us, and I saw him playing with a paper knife that lay on the table.

“Do I understand,” he asked, without looking at Ned, “that you have been making love to my daughter behind my back?”

“Not behind your back, sir,” replied Ned with a dignity for which I admired him. “We have been together since childhood.”

“Yes, it was very unwise on my part. But you have not replied to my question.”

“You have seen everything, sir, except that last night I allowed my feelings to get the better of me, and spoke when perhaps I should not have spoken.”

“That is properly said. You should not have spoken. Your declaration should first have been made to me.”

“I admit it, sir, and I have no excuse to offer, only that my feelings overcame me. I love Grace dearly, and she loves me.”

“A child’s fancy.”

“No, sir, indeed. Grace is no longer a child.”

“She has but just passed her seventeenth year,” said Benjamin Longmore, “and is, I repeat, a child—even more of a child than most girls of her age, for she has seen absolutely nothing of the world.”

I could have interposed here, and said that Grace knew more, not less, of the world than most young ladies of her age. Her visits in my company to administer her mother’s legacy to the wretched and suffering had opened her eyes to the true issues of life, and she had often surprised me by the depth and good

sense of her remarks. But I held my tongue ; I could best serve her and Ned—and I determined to serve them to the uttermost of my power, even in the teeth of an obdurate father—by saying nothing to displease him. In this resolve I was aware that I was practising a certain duplicity, but I believed myself justified by the issue at stake, the happiness of my dear Grace.

“It would be taking advantage of her inexperience,” continued Benjamin Longmore, “to bind her to a rash promise of which she might repent hereafter. You must see that yourself.”

“I do not think, sir,” said Ned, “that her promise was a rash one, and I am the last man in the world to hold her to it if she wished to be released.”

“I do not question your sincerity or good intentions, but I am speaking from one standpoint, you from another, and I know what is best for my child. Come, come,” he said, with an assumption of good humor, “give up this idle fancy. You are not in a position to provide for a home, and your father is not in a position to assist you. And if this were not as I say, Grace is too young to marry.”

“My fancy is not an idle one, sir,” said Ned respectfully and firmly ; “my love for Grace is rooted in my heart, and I have every hope and belief that it is the same with her. You are quite right in saying that I am not in a position to marry, and that Grace is too young. But in a few years, say three, things will be different. I shall work hard to make a position, and I shall succeed—yes, sir, I shall succeed. Grace and I are both content to wait. Will that content you, Mr. Longmore?”

“No,” said Benjamin Longmore, and so dark a cloud stole into his face that I saw it would go ill with poor

Ned, "it does not content me. I will not have my child absolutely bound for three of the brightest years of her life. There must be an end to the foolish affair, here and now. I have the right, as her father, to demand this of you."

"Pardon me, sir; the right rests with Grace and me. I cannot consent unless Grace bids me do so, to forego the one hope of my life. I implore you to think more favorably of me. You and my father have always been such good friends—he has the sincerest love for you; as I have—and you have always been so good and kind to me, that your refusal comes with a shock upon me. I am not rich, but I am a gentleman; my dear father made me one, and it is through his teaching that I know what is right, through his teaching that I shall be able to conduct myself with honor. Tell me, sir. Were I rich instead of poor would you receive my proposal in a different way. If I were able to provide a fitting home for you and Grace, would you——"

"Stop," interrupted Benjamin Longmore, "I do not admit your right to question me. You have heard what I have said, and if you act in opposition to my wishes"—he paused; even in his angry mood he hesitated a moment before he flung the bitter, bitter arrow—"if you act in opposition to my wishes, Edward Ollier, I shall be compelled to forbid you my house."

Ned quivered, as though an arrow had indeed been implanted in his breast.

"There is no need to do that, sir," he said, sadly, "and I hope you will not, for my father's sake. It would be like breaking his life off in the middle."

There was not much in the words to powerfully impress a man in Benjamin Longmore's present temper,

but nevertheless they must have struck some chord within him to cause him to say, in a more conciliatory tone:

“Come, we will make a bargain. Let things remain as they were, not as they are, for three years, and during that period engage yourself not to make love to Grace. She will have time to become better acquainted with the world, to know her own heart better; to see other men, to mix, perhaps, a little in society; and you will have time to work and advance yourself. When the three years have expired come to me again, and renew your proposal, if you are in the same mind, and I shall then be able to judge whether your circumstances are such as to warrant an engagement between you. I am not in favor of long engagements, and that is one reason why I will not allow the one into which you and Grace have entered without my consent to remain in force during so unreasonable a time. You acknowledge yourself that you have no expectation of being able to marry till Grace is twenty years of age, and the test I propose will serve not only the purposes I have named, but another of which I must convince myself; it will prove, or disprove, your constancy.”

Ned caught eagerly at the hope which this proposal contained; it was a long way from the best he could hope for, but it was also not the worst he had dreaded within a few moment after he entered the room. Sure of his own heart, sure of Grace's, he said:

“If Grace is willing, sir, I am.”

“Then there is an end of the matter for the present,” said Benjamin Longmore, holding out his hand, not very graciously, I own, but still there it was for Ned to take, and of course he seized it cordially. “I will

“speak to Grace myself, and you shall hear the result from her lips or mine. I remember some words you spoke when you and Grace were little children. You asked for my consent to marry her—I dare say you have not forgotten it.”

“Indeed I have not, sir.”

“Well, the words were—wait a moment”—he paused searching his mind—“yes, I have them, I think. You said that no gentleman would marry another gentleman’s daughter without the other gentleman’s consent. Miss Felicia was present; she will tell me whether I am right.”

“That is what Mr. Ned said,” I said.

I did not speak with any show of cordiality; I don’t know why, but I distrusted my master, and seemed to detect a false ring in his voice. Ned did not share my distrust; he was in a state of glowing excitement because of this changing of a foul wind into fair.

“Yes, sir,” he said, “they were my very words.”

“I answered, I remember,” continued Benjamin Longmore, “that the question was whether when you were a man you would hold to that, and you replied that you would not go back from your word. Give me now your assurance that you will not marry Grace without my consent, and prove yourself a man of honor.”

“I give you the assurance, sir,” said poor Ned.

“I accept it in spirit and letter. Now there is nothing more to be said at present. In three years we will have another chat upon this subject. Meanwhile, get rich.”

“That shall be my endeavor, sir.”

And away Ned went, after shaking hands with Benjamin Longmore and me, hesitating just a moment with

a longing in his mind to see our dear Grace ; but it was a longing to which he dared not give expression. He was not yet her accepted lover.

CHAPTER XIV.

PHILIP OLLIER BIDS US FAREWELL.

BENJAMIN LONGMORE proved himself to be a good judge of character in the confidence he reposed in me and Ned. He was satisfied that, our word once given, it would not be broken.

“Do you know, Miss Felicia,” he said, “that Edward Ollier’s proposal gave me a shock. I have not realized till now that Grace will soon be a woman. Hitherto I have regarded her as a mere child, but now my eyes are opened I must look more carefully after her.”

“Have you observed, sir,” I asked with direct intention, “how like her dear mother she has grown?”

“There is, I know, a close resemblance, Miss Felicia,” he said, his voice softening ; but his newer, and worse, nature asserted itself almost immediately. “Do not speak to Grace about this proposal, Miss Felicia.”

“But she must be told, sir.”

“She shall be, by me. Indeed, I will see her before I leave the house.”

“If she asks me, sir, whether I was present when the proposal was made I must answer truthfully.”

“Certainly you must, but you need not be too communicative. Do not excite her ; counsel her to be guided entirely by me. I have a great respect for you, Miss

Felicia, but in such matters as this my authority must not be disputed or weakened."

I bowed, and went to Grace and sent her down to her father, waiting anxiously in my room for the result of the interview. I was prepared for tears, for despondency, or hints at rebellion, but I am thankful to say I was mistaken. My mistake arose from my allowing myself to be influenced by my fears and my affection instead of by my reason. I ought to have known dear Grace better. Instead of rejoining me with a melancholy face she came in radiant.

"It's all right, Miss Felicia," she said; "we are to wait three years. That is just what we expected. Papa was very kind, although he did not speak quite so enthusiastically about Ned as he ought to have done; but I can't expect him to look at Ned with my eyes, can I?"

"No, dear. Has your father, then, consented to an engagement?"

"Well, not exactly an engagement; he wasn't quite clear in what he said. I think he was bothered a little because I spoke so plainly—yes, I did, Miss Felicia. I told him I loved Ned and Ned only, and that I should never love anyone else, in that way, you know, and that in a hundred years from now it would be just the same with me. I think, too, he is bothered about business, poor dear. Men *do* have a lot of worries, don't they, Miss Felicia? Then he looks upon me as if I was still a little child, and actually asked me how it was possible for me to know my own mind. I am not sure that I convinced him that I did know it, but I spoke very freely about Ned and myself, and I asked him if Ned wasn't the brightest, the handsomest, the manliest gentleman he had ever known. There again he was

not as enthusiastic as he ought to have been, and I told him so. Papa sent for me to speak to me, but I think, dear Miss Felicia," she said with a sweet laugh, "that it was I who spoke to him."

That was evident. I had feared that she would enter her father's presence with timidity and doubt, but instead of that she had met him with full confidence in him, in herself, and in the right and justice of her cause. Never have I seen in my dear Grace the least sign of boldness, but she has no false modesty, and can stand firm as a rock when she believes herself to be right.

"But you have not told me," I said, "about the engagement."

"Haven't I? I am a little excited, you know. Well, papa said he would prefer there should be no absolute engagement between us, but I answered that I had told Ned I loved him—which I do, which I do, dear Miss Felicia, with all my heart and soul—and that nothing could alter that. Then he said that Ned had promised to wait three years, and I said that I promised, too. 'In the meantime,' papa said, 'there is to be no engagement.' 'But there is one, papa,' I answered. 'Ned has told me he loves me, and I have told Ned I love him. There it is in a nutshell.' 'Keep it in the nutshell,' papa said. 'Let it be a private matter between ourselves ; don't let people know.' I said I didn't think of letting people know—as if we should go about talking of it, Miss Felicia—and in the end papa said, 'I hope, Grace, you will respect my wishes,' and I said of course I would, and called him a silly dear for saying such a thing to me, and went away telling him that I was the happiest, happiest girl in all the world. And I am, dear Miss Felicia."

From this account of the interview I inferred that Ben-

jamin Longmore must have been somewhat taken aback by his daughter's attitude, and that, in the light of her ingenuousness and of her trust in him and her own heart, his arguments had crumbled to dust.

I know what passed between Grace and Ned that night.

"Papa has spoken to me, Ned," she said, "and we are to wait three years."

"And meanwhile?" asked Ned, anxiously.

"Meanwhile," she answered, with a charming smile, "we are to love each other very much."

I don't know how Ned reconciled things in his own mind, but he passed a happy evening, and I am sure he went away loving his dear girl more than ever, if it were possible, and with a thorough belief that she would be true to him whatever was the fate fortune had in store for him.

Stirring events were soon to claim our attention; in our own house clouds were brightening, from a worldly point of view, but over our dear friends, the Olliers, dark clouds were gathering.

One day I was informed that Mr. Ollier was downstairs, and wished to see me. It was an unusual hour for him to call, the middle of the day, and I felt that something unusual had happened. There was trouble in Philip Ollier's face, and I clasped his hand warmly.

"I come to speak to a friend," he said.

"She is here, Mr. Ollier," I said.

"You have a true heart, Miss Felicia. You see, I have no one else to speak to, to confide in." He spoke in a helpless way, and I sincerely pitied him.

"Open your heart to me, Mr. Ollier," I said; "a mouse once helped a lion."

"Have you heard nothing concerning me?" he asked.

"Nothing of any importance," I replied.

"Mr. Longmore has known it for the last two weeks, and of course Ned has known it. I did not suppose that Ned would introduce the subject to you, not wishing to grieve you or Grace, but thought it possible that Mr. Longmore might have mentioned it. To come to the point, Miss Felicia, I have lost my situation."

"I am truly, truly sorry, Mr. Ollier."

"Yes, it is a thing to be sorry for, and yet there rises sometimes an odd fancy that I shall be thankful for it in the future. You see, Miss Felicia, men may work too much and too long in one groove, and if that groove be not a golden one there he is, at the end of a long life of service, no better off than he was at the commencement. Still, I should have done nothing to get out of the groove in which I have been moving for so many years ; but the fact is, I have been forced out of it. Our firm has stopped payment, and the business is being wound up. Ned—the dearest lad, Miss Felicia,—has done all he could to comfort me, and I speak honestly when I say that it is for his sake, much more than for my own, that I regret the crisis. Unfortunately my emoluments have been so small that as fast as I earned money, it went out ; so that now I find myself without the means to support our home. Ned's hundred a-year will not do it, and I am not going to be a burden upon him ; it is just about enough to keep himself. Then I see the shadow of another approaching trouble which seems to be hidden from Ned. If he has any suspicion of it he keeps it to himself, which would be a natural outcome of his nature ; it is not in him to add to my suffering. The firm in which he is engaged is tottering ; I have heard it whispered in the city ; and there Ned will be, in the same plight as myself."

"Ned will always get on, Mr. Ollier," I said, with an endeavor to brighten him up.

"Ah, my dear Miss Felicia, you don't know what struggling men have to go through nowadays."

"What does Mr. Longmore say to all this?" I asked.

Philip Ollier rose and paced the room, which was his usual habit when he was more than ordinarily disturbed.

"I don't know how to answer you," he said, with a deeper sadness in his voice. "As age creeps on all the strength, all the resources of our moral nature seem to be needed to sustain our faith. New and bitter lessons come and mock us, whispering that we have been living in a fool's paradise. Miss Felicia, something—I know not what—has come between my old friend and me. We are not to each other as we used to be, as I once believed we would be till we were in the last stage of all. Is the change in him or in me? I question my heart and I can find nothing to reproach myself with—but that may be my mistake. We are blind to our own faults. There was a time when Mr. Longmore's full sympathy would have been given to me in trouble, as mine would have been given to him. But now, but now——well, he listens, and says he is sorry, but words have a soul as well as a body, and I miss the soul which once gave spiritual life to the words he addressed to me."

I did not remonstrate with him; I should not have been true to myself, to him, if I had striven to convince him that he was wrong in his impressions. The grievous change that had taken place in Benjamin Longmore was too clear to be ignored, to be argued away. It grieved me to know, from the knowledge of my master's affairs which my new duties imposed upon me,

that it was in his power to assist his friend, and I gathered from Philip Ollier's words that this assistance had not been offered. Hazardous as were the speculations in which my master was engaged, they were prospering, and it was only yesterday that he said to me, with an air of triumph, that he was two thousand pounds richer than he had been a month before. And still he did not step forward with that practical sympathy which the close and long intercourse between the friends not only warranted but demanded.

"Now," said Philip Ollier, "I am about to speak of another matter, which is indeed the principal reason for my visit. I have not made money in my career, Miss Felicia, but I have earned respect, and an offer has been made to me which I am hesitating whether I ought to accept. It is an offer to transact some business in Australia which will necessitate my absence from England for a considerable time. I am not sure whether it will be eventually profitable to me, but it provides me with a salary upon which I can live, and there is a chance of something better springing from it. It will tear me from old and cherished associations, it will separate me from Ned. I have not spoken of it to him yet; I came first to consult you, to ask you whether I should accept it."

"It holds out a chance of good fortune, you say."

"Yes, Miss Felicia, it certainly does that; but it will take me from England—it will tear me from my dear lad."

"Only for a time, Mr. Ollier."

"Then you advise me to accept it?"

"Nothing better offering, Mr. Ollier," I said firmly, "I should advise you to accept it. Through its means you may by and by be of assistance to your son."

"You look upon it as a duty, Miss Felicia?"

"I do, sir."

"It has presented itself to me in that light. Thank you for your advice; it has strengthened me. I shall accept the offer. Miss Felicia, my dear Ned will be here all alone."

"He will not, Mr. Ollier. Grace is here with him, and I."

"Once more I thank you, from my heart. I cannot think of anything that may arise that would deprive Ned of your friendship."

"Nothing can arise, Mr. Ollier. I promise to be a mother to him, and I will not allow him to slip from us."

He pressed my hand and said, "how sweet is true friendship! What balm it brings to a man's heart!"

"If the matter is decided," I asked, "how soon will you have to go?"

"Too soon. In three days I must be ready to start."

"It may be better so, Mr. Ollier, better than lingering."

"Yes, indeed. There is another thing. Despite the altered relations between Mr. Longmore and me I shall screw up my courage to ask a favor of him. I have a strong impression that in case Ned loses his present situation it may be in Mr. Longmore's power to assist him to another. Surely he will not refuse me. It is not much to ask."

"I think he would be willing," I said, and I really thought so, or I should not have said as much.

"I will ask him to-night. I should like to see Grace, not to tell her what I have told you; I shall leave that for you to do."

I called Grace down, and she received him with a

kiss, and asked after Ned. Seeing that he was sad she applied herself in a general way to cheer him up, and he left us with a lighter heart and brighter face.

A gentle melancholy pervaded our family circle on this night. The news of Philip Ollier's approaching departure had been communicated to all, and even Benjamin Longmore was softened by the impending separation. Some shadowy spirit of the old cordiality was manifest in their conversation, and Philip Ollier, before he left, took an opportunity of informing me that my master had promised to assist Ned to a new situation in case he required one. I was thankful for that much, but knowing that my master did nothing further to help his friend, even by the offer of a small loan, I could not but mourn over the selfishness and the greed for money which had entered his soul, and threatened to blot out all his higher and better attributes.

I will not linger upon the details of Philip Ollier's departure. I saw the leave-taking between him and Grace, but not that between him and his dear Ned, which must have been painful and heart-rending.

"You must not grieve, dear Mr. Ollier," said the sweet girl as they stood together his arm around her; "we will take care of Ned, Miss Felicia and I. We shall not try to make him forget you, but we will help him to be cheerful and happy all the time you are away."

I remember that Philip Ollier once attempted to start the old song, "When we were boys, jolly, jolly boys," but he broke down in the second line.

We all stood at the street door, watching him and Ned go down the street arm in arm. Presently neither Grace nor I could see their forms, our eyes being filled with tears. When I wiped mine away I looked at Ben-

jamin Longmore, and saw him standing on the footpath with a preoccupied expression on his face. The next moment he turned on his heel and entered the house, his lips tightly closed, as though a pregnant chapter in his life was closed for ever.

CHAPTER XV.

GRACE CLAIMS HER SHARE OF SORROW.

WHAT Philip Ollier predicted came to pass. It is a trite saying that misfortunes never come singly, but that does not make it less true. Before there was time for a letter to reach us from Australia, Ned's firm broke up, and he was thrown out of employment. Benjamin Longmore was good as his word. He offered Ned a situation in an office in the city which, to my surprise, I learned only then that he had opened to transact his new operations in. The salary was the same as that which Ned had received, and the young man therefore was no better off. But he was no worse off, and the mischief of idleness was spared to him. As to the particular nature of the business that was transacted in this office I am not in a position to offer any enlightenment. My master had imposed secrecy upon me in my new duties, and doubtless he had imposed the same obligation upon Ned, who never opened his lips upon the subject. I was struck by certain signs in Ned which gave me pain. His new service did not seem to sit easily upon him. A thoughtfulness stole into his face, and there was now a marked constraint in his manner when we were all sitting together in Benjamin Longmore's house.

“My dear boy is not as bright as I would like him to be,” said Grace to me. “The separation from his father is making him melancholy.”

That may have been, but that alone was not the cause of what I observed in him. Of course I was ignorant of the exact business relations between him and Benjamin Longmore—I mean of their personal association, whether it was conducted agreeably or otherwise; but it jarred upon me that Benjamin Longmore, even in our private intercourse at home, occasionally spoke to Ned with the air of a master speaking to a man in his service. It jarred upon Ned, too, and I saw him upon those occasions look at Grace, as if to ascertain what she thought of it.

If anything could have set his mind at ease it was my dear girl's conduct towards him. It was marked by extreme delicacy and tenderness, and she made it as plain to him as a modest maiden may that her feelings for him were those of sincere and absorbing love. It helped to comfort him, but it did not remove the cause for uneasiness and self-questioning. After a time I heard from him that things were not going well with his father.

“He is not only ill and unfortunate, Miss Felicia,” he said, “but he is breaking his heart because we are separated.”

“Have you spoken to Grace of this?” I asked.

“No,” replied Ned, “I do not wish to pain her.”

“It will pain her more,” I said, “when she learns that you are keeping a secret from her.”

“Shall I tell her, then?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said, “let there be absolute confidence between you.”

It was the dear girl herself, however, who broached

the subject first, at the very moment Ned was about to confide in her. We three were in the sitting-room alone. My master was in his study, poring over figures; Grandmamma Longmore was nursing a slight cold in her bedroom.

“Ned,” said Grace; they spoke quite openly before me, “I have a right to share your sorrows. What is grieving you?”

“He was going to tell you to-night, dear,” I said, “and has been silent only because he would keep sorrow from you.”

“You must not do that, dear Ned,” said Grace; “it is mine as well as yours, and I claim my share.”

Profoundly affected, Ned unbosomed himself, and gave her his father’s letters to read.

“Dear Ned,” said Grace, “if it were not for me you would go to him?”

“If it were not for you,” said Ned, “and if I had the means I would go to him. May I confess something to you?”

“You must, Ned; you must confess everything.”

“I have been saving a little money, towards the time when we—but I must not speak of that.”

“Towards the time when we are married,” said Grace sweetly. “Go on, dear Ned.”

“It is but a drop in the ocean, only twenty pounds up to now. Lately when I have received my dear father’s letters the thought has come into my mind that what I have saved would be nearly enough to take me to him.”

“And it is only because of me that you do not entertain this thought quite seriously. Tell me, dear Ned.”

“Yes,” said Ned in a low tone. “I cannot bear the thought of going away from you.”

"But, dear Ned," said Grace, laying her hand upon his, "your father claims your first duty. I come afterwards."

"No, no," cried Ned, but she held up her hand and stopped him.

"When I think, dear Ned," she said, "of all that your dear father is in himself, of all that he has done for you, of the love he bears for you, *my* duty becomes very clear to me."

"*Your* duty Grace!"

"Yes, Ned, *my* duty. It is not I who must keep you from his side. If he needs you, it is your duty to go to him, and my duty to tell you to go."

"And what will you do, Grace?" asked Ned, in a voice of great sadness.

"Remain here, and be true to you till better times shine on us. Yes, Ned, dear, you may be sure I shall remain true and faithful; and better times will come, be sure of that, too. Perhaps," and now she spoke in a lower tone, and her head was cast down, "there is another reason why you should go. I have also had a secret which I have kept from you. Do you think I have not seen that you are not happy in my father's service? Do you not think I have not seen how you have suffered when he has spoken to you, here and in this room, as he should not have spoken to one so dear to us? I have seen it all dear Ned and I say to you, Go, and God bless you! Who knows? You may find in a new land the opportunity you cannot meet with here. Many another man has done it—why not you? And Ned dear," she concluded, a tender archness stealing into her voice, "you should go for my sake as well as for your father's. We cannot marry without papa's consent, and that he will not give till you are rich. You

will have a better chance of getting rich in the new world than in the old ; and though I will wait for you, if I must, till I am an old woman, I would rather not wait so long."

I cannot describe how this speech stirred us ; its thoughtfulness, its unselfishness, its wisdom, its tenderness, impressed me more deeply than anything I had ever heard, and I lifted up my heart in thankfulness that our dear Grace had grown to be what her mother would have had her if she had lived to teach and guide her. As for Ned, he gazed upon the sweet girl with reverence and devotion, and I saw that she had infused into his breast in this most trying hour the hope and courage which were needed to strengthen him. And let me say here that beyond such expressions of tenderness as I have recorded there was no love-making in the common acceptation of the term between Grace and Ned. Tacitly consenting to Benjamin Longmore's wishes respecting their engagement they had not kissed each other once since the night upon which they had plighted their troth. I could not but admire and commend them for their conduct ; if anything were needed to prove the purity of their love, it was this.

The result of the present conversation was that Ned said he would wait till he received the next letter from his father, and if matters had not then improved he would go—to come back and claim Grace before the three years were expired.

As events turned out his departure was more sudden than any of us expected. It took place on the day of the week which was devoted by Grace and me to the disposal of Mrs. Longmore's legacy, and it happened that on this day we were absent from the house for a much longer time than usual. We went out early in the

morning, and did not return till nearly six o'clock in the evening. The moment we entered the house a servant gave Grace the following letter :

“MY DEAR GRACE,—I called at the house at twelve o'clock to see you, and to my bitter disappointment found you were not at home. I remembered then that this is the day for your visits to the poor, and that it was probable you would not get home till the afternoon. I cannot wait till then to see you ; if I did I should miss the ship that will take me to my father. Grace, dear, I received a letter from him this morning, and I fear he is dying ; I fear that I may be too late to see him alive. I dare not linger here a day, an hour, with my father's cry from the other side of the world ringing in my ears. A ship sails from Plymouth for Melbourne very early to-morrow, at sunrise I am told, and a friend has given me a note to the agents there, who will, I hope, provide me with a berth in the steerage for the twenty pounds I have been able to save out of my salary. I have just enough money besides to take me to Plymouth, a train for which place starts at three o'clock. You see I have not a minute to lose. It pains me sorely to leave so suddenly, without being able to bid you good-bye, but my duty calls me, and you will not blame me. Your father will think my sudden departure strange ; I cannot help that ; he will not be sorry to lose me, as he has not a high opinion of my abilities. Him, also, I have been unable to see, but I have explained to him in a letter the urgent reason for my leaving so abruptly. I have no time to write at greater length. Good-bye, dear Grace. Heaven watch over and protect you. I shall write to you from Australia, and it would be a joy to me to find a letter from you awaiting me on my arrival. Send it to my dear father's

address, where you have already written. What would I not give to be able to go on the mail steamer? But it is out of the question. I think I never realized till now the true value of money. Once more, dear Grace, good-bye. I shall never change; my heart will always be the same. Pray with me that my fears concerning my dear father are groundless, and that he will be restored to health and strength. I seem to feel that if I only arrive in time I shall be able to save him. Give my love to dear Miss Felicia.

“Affectionately Yours,

“NED OLLIER.”

In a postscript Ned gave the name of the ship he was going out in, “The Silver Queen.”

Grace read this letter in silence, and giving it to me to read, went to the window and sat there quietly. When I returned the letter she said:

“I am glad Ned has gone. I am afraid if I wrote a letter and addressed it to him on the ship it would not reach him in time.”

“I fear not, dear.”

“But we can send a telegram,” she said.

We proceeded immediately to the nearest telegraph office, and the telegram was despatched:

“DEAR NED. You have done what is right. I shall pray for your safety and your dear father’s recovery, Miss Felicia and I unite in love. You will be ever in my thoughts and in my heart. GRACE.”

On our way home Grace said:

“Unless papa speaks to us of Ned I should prefer not to say anything. Ned has explained things to him, and it is for papa to speak first, if he wishes to do so.”

I had nothing to urge against this proposal, divining that Grace, knowing that Ned was not greatly in favor with her father, wished not to be compelled to say anything that would vex him ; for that she would stand up boldly in defence of her lover there was not in my mind the least doubt. But Benjamin Longmore said nothing whatever about Ned, and for a long time the young man's name was not referred to in any conversation between father and daughter. Grace, however, questioned the servant upon the subject of Ned's visit to the house.

"He seemed very much flurried, miss," the girl said, "and asked if no one was at home. I said only Mrs. Longmore, and he asked to see her."

This was news to us, and we hurried to Grandmamma Longmore to ascertain what Ned had said to her.

"Dear, dear !" exclaimed the old lady. "What should he say ? He just called in, that was all."

"But grandma," said Grace, "didn't he say something about going away ?"

"Oh, yes," replied Grandmamma Longmore. "I remember now he did say something or other about a journey, but whether it was to Cheslea or China I really cannot tell you. There, don't bother me any more ; I want to go to sleep."

When Grandmamma Longmore was not inclined to be communicative there was no getting anything out of her, so we left her to her repose ; but I could not help thinking that she was concealing something from us—a reflection that caused me a fit of self-reproach for doing her an injustice. Whether I did so or not will hereafter be seen.

The day after Ned was gone, Grace and I walked to my dear mistress's grave. We always did so, at Grace's

prompting, when her heart was troubled. Benjamin Longmore had set up a tombstone, and there was a railing round the grave, which was bright and blooming with flowers. I must tell you here that although we invariably took flowers to my honored mistress's last earthly resting place, and paid the man who looked after the grounds for the planting of others over the grave, its blooming appearance was not due entirely to us. Much more was done than our money would provide for, and I had not discovered by whose orders. I had repeatedly questioned the care-taker upon the subject, but he was obstinately reserved, and would not give me any information. All that he would say was:

"I am paid for what's done, and there's an end of it."

In my mind I gave the credit to Benjamin Longmore, who, I decided, had imposed silence upon the man. On the occasion of this visit, however, I was undeceived.

When we were within a few yards of the grave I saw the man in conversation with a gentleman and a lady, who were pointing to the ground, and giving some instructions respecting it. The lady had brought with her a parcel of roots, which the man was taking from the paper she held in her hand, and arranging them about the ground as he was directed. Approaching closer, the gentleman and lady turned to look at us.

The lady, who was young, of the same age as Grace I judged, and almost as pretty—(not quite; that I would never allow)—I did not know, but the gentleman I recognized immediately. It was Mr. Macmillan.

It gave me true pleasure to see him, and to discover

that it was he who had secretly helped us to make the grave bright and beautiful.

"It is you," I said, holding out my hand, "who has done this through all these years."

"It is little to do," he said, fixing his eyes on Grace very earnestly. "You need not tell me who this lady is. How she resembles her mother!" He now addressed Grace. "I remember your name; your sainted mother told me one day when she lifted me from the deepest trouble of my life. You are Miss Grace Longmore."

"Yes," said Grace.

"My name is Macmillan," he said, "and what I am I owe to her." He pointed to the grave. "This is my daughter Mary, who holds your mother in loving and honored remembrance. She was with me in the park one dolorous morning, when all the world was dark and my heart was filled with bitterness and rebellion. An angel came up to us—your mother; and from that moment there was light in heaven, and the world became beautiful.

Grace extended her hands to Mary Macmillan, and kissed her.

"It is what her mother would have done, it is what her mother did to my little Mary on that day."

"You have prospered," I said.

"Beyond my expectations. I have made money, and have more than enough. Miss Felicia—I do not forget, you see—there are men, women, and children living respectable lives, who owe their salvation to the lesson I learned that morning in the park. I say it humbly, not in laudation of myself."

My heart swelled with gratitude the flowers on the grave were not more bright and beautiful than the deeds

inspired by her whose last remains lay within that narrow space.

"I should like to know you and your daughter better," said Grace, very sweetly.

"We shall feel honored," said Mr. Macmillan, giving her his card.

"We do not live in a grand house, but if you visit us I may be able to show you something that will interest you."

"We will come," said Grace.

He did not prolong the interview. We shook hands all round, and Grace and Mary Macmillan kissed each other again, and then we went our several ways.

CHAPTER XVI.

"WHO SLANDERS HIM, SLANDERS ME."

THE most interesting column in the newspapers now for Grace and me was the column which contained the shipping news. Daily we scanned it, long before it was possible that any news of "The Silver Queen" could be found there. Grace wrote regularly to Ned, and never a day passed that we did not speak about him. So time rolled on, and brought changes in its march. Benjamin Longmore gave up his situation, and devoted himself entirely to his speculations. He was wonderfully lucky; everything he touched turned to gold, and gold, gold, gold was now his chief and only object in life. He did not speak to us of Ned, nor did we to him. With grief did I observe that his one topic of conversation was money. His face grew hard, his eyes were lighted up with greed; the worst quali-

ties of his nature were brought into play. For him there was now no sweetness in home; the dear old days were gone, apparently never to return. The transformation in him was complete and appalling.

Grace saw the change as well as I, but we did not refer to it. In our conversations about Ned we calculated that it would take five months from the day of his departure before a letter could reach us. Three months of these five were gone, and still no news of Ned's ship.

We grew anxious, restless. "Is it likely," said Grace, "that we could have overlooked the arrival of the ship?"

I ascertained the address of the London agents of the vessel, and we made inquiries there, and came away with sinking hearts. "The Silver Queen," now overdue, had not arrived at its destination, and it was evident that they had fears for its safety. Another week passed, and still no news. Grace went out sometimes by herself, and paid regular visits to the shipping office. On the occasion of one of these visits Benjamin Longmore had sent for me to assist him in some accounts, and I had therefore to forego my wish to accompany her.

The events of this day can never fade from my memory. Placing papers before me, and giving me some necessary instructions, Benjamin Longmore left the room. I was looking down the lists before commencing when I came to a line that caused the blood to rush into my face and eyes, and for a little while I was blind. My pulses throbbed at fever heat; I was dazed and overcome.

Rising, I shook myself violently in the effort to recover my senses. The mist before my eyes melted away; I could see once more. Looking down upon

the line, I read it again. The words and figures were :
“ Stolen by Edward Ollier, £200.”

“ Do you understand the figures, Miss Felicia?” asked Benjamin Longmore, returning to the room.

“ I have not commenced yet,” I replied. “ What is the meaning of this ? ”

I pointed to the line. He read it slowly :

“ ‘ Stolen by Edward Ollier, £200.’ That is quite correct.”

“ It cannot be, sir,” I said.

“ It is, I tell you,” he said impatiently. “ That is the sum of which Edward Ollier robbed me.”

“ Are you dreaming sir ? ” I cried, indignantly.
“ Can you be in your right senses ? ”

“ I am wide awake, Miss Felicia, and in my right senses.”

I laid down my pen.

“ I can do nothing until you give me an explanation of this wicked falsehood.”

He looked at me sternly, bit his lip, and said :

“ Because of your service and position in my family, Miss Felicia, I will overlook your indiscretion, and will give you the explanation you ask for. It is very simple. Edward Ollier left the country very suddenly, and ran away with two hundred pounds of my money, paying for his passage with part of it, and probably squandering the rest. It was only my old associations with his father that prevented me from prosecuting him, and from having detectives sent after him to bring him back.”

“ Edward Ollier,” I retorted, “ paid for his steerage passage in ‘ The Silver Queen ’ with twenty pounds which he was able to save out of his salary.”

“ How do you know that ? ”

"The information was conveyed to me in a letter from him."

"But it is not difficult to write a letter," said Benjamin Longmore; "it is not difficult to say that you take a steerage passage when you occupy the saloon. I repeat, this young man robbed me."

"How? In what way?"

"It is again very simple. On the morning of his flight I had left at the office for him an envelope containing bank notes for two hundred pounds which he was to take personally to Guilford, and pay to a firm of lawyers there, and bring back a receipt. There were reasons of my own why I desired that this money should be paid in money instead of by check, and personally by an agent of mine instead of being sent through the post. Miss Felicia, the money was never paid. Edward Ollier put it into his pocket and ran away with it. He is a thief."

A cry of horror rang through the room. Turning, we saw Grace, who had entered while we were conversing, and had overheard the frightful accusation. She held a paper in her hand; her face was white; her limbs were trembling.

"Grace, my darling Grace!" I cried, running toward her.

"Do not touch me," she cried, holding her hands against me, "do not speak to me! Let me be a moment—a moment—a moment!"

By a supreme effort she called up all her strength; she controlled the trembling of her body; her voice was firmer when she spoke. But the horror still dwelt in her eyes, and her face was white as falling snow. Stepping close to Benjamin Longmore she said:

"What words were those you uttered, father?"

From that day she never called him "papa" but used the word "father" instead.

"I am sorry you overheard me, Grace," he replied; "what I said was intended for Miss Felicia's ears alone."

"But Miss Felicia is my friend," said Grace. "I have not a secret hidden from her, and she would not hide this from me. She knows me—she knows my heart. What you said to her about one who cannot defend himself"—her face suddenly dropped into her hands; as suddenly she lifted it again—"must be said to me."

"If it must be, it must," said Benjamin Longmore. "Edward Ollier robbed me of two hundred pounds. He is a thief."

"He was no thief," exclaimed Grace, and her voice rang clear and loud. "He was a gentleman, pure and unstained. As I am a sinless woman, no sin lies at his door. Who slanders him, slanders me! Tell me more. I know you have received letters from his father. Have you replied to them? Have you dared to fling this vile accusation into his face as you have flung it into mine? I will be answered, father."

"You shall be. Yes, I have received letters from Mr. Philip Ollier, and I have replied to them, for the last time. He will never hear from me again. I have told him what I have told you—that his son is a thief."

"How horrible, how horrible," said Grace, "to slander the innocent dead!"

"The dead, my darling Grace!" I cried. "The dead!"

"The Silver Queen," she said, "the ship my Ned went out in, is lost at sea. Lost, lost at sea! Not a soul is saved!"

The paper fluttered from her hands to the ground. I picked it up quickly, and read the appalling news, contained in a telegram, that "The Silver Queen" had foundered at sea, with all on board.

"May you live to repent it!" said Grace to her father. "O, my Ned, my noble, innocent Ned! O, my heart, my heart!"

She made a wild movement of her hands, and swayed to and fro. Had it not been for the support of my arms she would have fallen; but I held her insensible form close, close to my breast, and bore her slowly from the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

GRANDMAMMA LONGMORE'S VANITIES COME TO AN END.

LATER intelligence confirmed the sad news. How eagerly we read the newspapers and searched their columns for one ray of hope! But none was given to us. Every succeeding piece of news strengthened the first rumors until they became a certainty. Floating pieces of timber from the doomed ship were picked up by vessels homeward and outward bound, among them part of the figure head of the vessel, which seemed to place its fate beyond the possibility of doubt.

Whatever it was in my power to do to comfort Grace's bruised heart that did I do with all the earnestness of my earnest love. For a long, long time I despaired of my darling's recovery; I feared she would die, for she lay, indeed, for some time between life and death. But the good Lord was merciful, and she was spared to us. Ah, the day when the doctor informed me that she was out of danger—what a joyful day it was! I

had the sole charge of my dear, and I would allow no one to attend to her but myself.

Regularly every day I conveyed to Benjamin Longmore the intelligence of his daughter's state, and I was glad to see that during that time of agonized uncertainty his heart seemed to be softened; but when he knew that Grace was out of danger the demon that had taken possession of his soul re-asserted itself, and he renewed his pursuit after gold with even keener zest than before. While his daughter lay near to death I thought it right to read to him part of the letter which Grace received from Ned on the day he went away.

"You must perceive, sir," I said, referring to Ned's words: "Him, also, I have been unable to see, but I have explained to him in a letter the urgent reason for my leaving so abruptly;" "that Ned wrote to you before he left."

"No letter ever reached me," said Benjamin Longmore. "Miss Felicia, I prefer not to say another word upon this subject. I do not suppose that Grace will refer to it; nor shall I. Enough mischief has already been done."

It may have been foolish in me to ask, "Do you still retain your opinion, sir?"

"I still retain my opinion," he replied. "And now let the matter drop."

When Grace was strong enough to rise and dress we both wore mourning for Ned. I did not do so while she was abed, dreading the effect of a black dress upon her spirits, and it was she who asked me to have mourning prepared for her. There was no lack of money. Benjamin Longmore gave freely, and did not demur to the demands I made upon his purse. Grace said to me once:

“Do not neglect my father, Miss Felicia.”

I did not ; the home went on as usual, only that the light had departed from it. For two or three evenings after Grace came downstairs her father sat with us, but there was no flow of conversation. We sat very quiet, reading and writing, and it was only when Grace and I retired to bed that our thoughts found free expression. Very soon Benjamin Longmore absented himself from our society in the evening, but before he did so Grace said to him :

“Father, you are getting rich, are you not?”

“I am making money,” he answered.

“More than you have ever done before?”

“Yes, more than I have ever done. And I shall make more still.”

“Will you give me some?”

“How much?”

“If you can spare it, I should like you to give me a pound a week, to spend in whatever way I please.”

“You shall have it, Grace. Here is the first quarter.”

He gave her two five pound notes and three sovereigns. I knew well why she asked him for this money ; she intended that it should be given away in charity, so that upon some small portion of her father’s gains a blessing might rest ; and in that way it was disposed of. When she was quite convalescent she said to me :

“I am glad I am well again, Miss Felicia. There is work in the world to do. As my dear mamma’s memory is honored, so shall Ned’s be.”

Before we had received the sad news of the loss of Ned’s ship we had paid a visit to Mr. Macmillan, who, in another part of the east of London than that we had been in the habit of going, was engaged in noble work of his own devising. He had established work-

shops in which outcast boys were taught trades, and when they were of a suitable age, sent abroad, to different British colonies. His practical mind rendered him eminently fit to conduct a benevolent enterprise of this nature, and I may be permitted here to record my belief that men who work as he was doing are the true apostles of humanity and civilization. We asked to be allowed to assist him by our poor efforts, and he gladly enrolled us. Thus my dear Grace found a new sphere of duties which not alone enlisted her sympathies, but prevented her from brooding to an injurious degree over the great sorrow of her life.

The first thing she had done after her illness, when she was able to hold a pen, was to write to Philip Ollier a letter of condolence upon the loss of his dear son. It was a letter which none but a tender-souled and faithful woman could have written; and in the reference she made to her father she gave Philip Ollier clearly to understand that slanderous whispers against the living and the dead found no echo in her heart.

"As long as I live," she said, "I shall mourn dear Ned as the best and noblest man I have known. He is lost to us, but I, as well as you, dear Mr. Ollier, will be faithful to his memory."

She signed herself, "Your loving daughter."

To this letter she received no direct reply, but Philip Ollier wrote to me. His reason for doing so, he said, was that Mr. Longmore had forbidden him to address any further letters to him or his daughter, and that he deemed it wrong to do anything that might effect a breach between father and daughter. Nevertheless he made it quite clear that Grace's letter had brought him inexpressible comfort and balm. "Grace is like her mother," he said; "I can give her no higher praise."

He sent his dear love to her and said he would never forget her.

Grace was not deterred from writing to him again because he did not reply direct to her. She told him she approved of his motive, and that it was her intention to send him a letter every month unless he forbade her. Thus a three-cornered correspondence was kept up between us. From time to time we were cheered by the news he gave us. He had got over his sickness, and was at work again. There were opportunities, he said, of making money, but he had no heart to try.

"Tell him to try, Miss Felicia," she said, "and to send you home a little for our charities."

This, now, was the one object of her life, to do good to others.

I gave Philip Ollier her message, and from that time he commenced to remit to me a monthly draft which was added to our store. Thus, out of deepest sorrow sprang sweetest flowers.

And so time rolled on until my dear Grace was twenty-one years of age, when she came into possession of her mother's legacy. Benjamin Longmore, to do him justice, was the first to acquaint her that she was now mistress of a capital amounting to over one thousand pounds, in addition to her mother's original legacy.

"You had better leave the money in my hands," he said. "I have been fortunate in my investment of the interest, and I can do even better for you now."

To this Grace would not consent, saying that she desired the whole of the money should be given to her, to dispose of as she pleased. He argued with her, but she was not to be turned from her resolve, and in the end he gave her a check for the full amount, saying that she would lose every penny of it.

With this check we went to Mr. Macmillan, and after some private talk between him and Grace, he consented to invest the money as she desired and to undertake the conduct of the business details it involved. I was not hurt that she settled the matter privately with Mr. Macmillan, knowing that it was necessary she should give him an explanation of her motives, in which her father's name could not but be introduced; and it was best she should do this without the presence of a third person.

I must now say something of Benjamin Longmore's proceedings during these years.

The good fortune which had attended his first speculations clung to him pertinaciously. He still claimed my services from time to time, but he had relieved me of the greater portion of the duties he had imposed upon me, and it was only about once a month that I was closeted with him in the manipulation of figures. I was amazed by what I learned. Money was rolling in upon him, and his investments and speculations became colossal. I saw his name quoted in certain papers, which he kept in his private room, as a millionaire, and though this was not exactly the truth, there was a fair justification for the statement. Shortly after he handed Grace her little fortune he boastfully stated to me that he was worth not less than five hundred thousand pounds.

"What is he going to do with all this money?" I thought. "He cannot take it with him to the grave."

It was at about this time that men began to come to the house whose only conversation was money. It seemed to be the pulse of their existence, the blood of their life. Money, money, money; nothing but money. The rise and fall of stocks and shares, the launching of

new companies, were the only topics. My master gave dinners at his house, and Grace and I, at his desire, took our places at the table ; and upon Grace's ears and mine the flow of conversation produced the same effect, amazement and disgust. Some of the guests were enlightened men, others were coarse and vulgar, but success in the making of money rendered them all equal. We could not make ourselves agreeable to these fortune-hunters, and after awhile, Benjamin Longmore, perceiving that the association was distasteful to us, gave his grand dinners in grand hotels and clubs, for which we were truly thankful. From that time we saw but little of him at home.

Grandmamma Longmore took great pride in her son's success, and in his honor arrayed herself in new dresses of silk and velvet which ill became her. But Grandmamma Longmore was failing; her mind began to wander ; she babbled about her childhood's reminiscences in a manner that warned us that her end was approaching. And still her new craze for new dresses did not diminish with her failing strength. It shocked us to observe her vanity and the narrowness of her mind, but we paid her every attention, and bore with her weaknesses and shortcomings quietly and patiently. She took to her bed, and could not rise from it ; and now she would not be satisfied without silk coverings on her bed and the furniture in her room, and costly hangings to her windows. Her son begrudged her nothing ; it was to him she expressed her wishes, and he gratified them with a pride and ostentation which were odious to me. He gave her diamond rings, and she would draw our attention to them, holding up her fingers to the light, and saying :

“See what a great man my son is now. He will be king of the world.”

“King of the world,” I thought, “but how about the next?”

Early one morning she beckoned to me with her head, not having the strength to speak. She strove hard to do so, but could not.

“Shall I call your son?” I asked.

She nodded feebly many times, and I went for Benjamin Longmore. He remained with her an hour or more, and then he came to me hurriedly and bade me send quickly for the doctor. But when the doctor arrived all was over. Grandmamma Longmore was dead. So wonderfully thin and small had her face suddenly become that it looked like a baby's face a hundred years old. And spread out upon the counterpane were her shrunken, attenuated hands covered with diamond rings.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A VOICE FROM THE GRAVE.

THERE have been many memorable days in my life, but not one more memorable than the day following Grandmamma Longmore's funeral.

As Grace and I were sitting together towards the close of the afternoon, within a few minutes of the hour at which Benjamin Longmore generally returned home, we heard the postman's knock at the door, and a servant came in with a number of letters, which she handed to Grace. Benjamin Longmore's correspondence, both in his office and home, was now very heavy, and Grace took from the tray at least twenty letters, which she placed by her side without looking over them. We were engaged upon some accounts in connection with our

charities, and we wished to finish them before Benjamin Longmore came home, so the letters lay in a pile while we proceeded with our task. No sooner was it completed than Benjamin Longmore entered the room.

Grace glanced at the letters, and said :

“They are all for you, father.”

He took them from her, nodded, and left us.

“You have dropped a letter, Grace,” I said.

She stooped and picked it up, and a wild, frightened look flashed into her eyes.

“What is it, Grace?” I asked, in alarm.

She did not answer, but stood, with her eyes fixed upon the letter in her hand.

“Look at it,” she whispered. “Merciful God! Can I be dreaming?”

I looked at the letter, which she held tight, though her hands were trembling. It was addressed to Miss Grace Longmore, and unless my eyes deceived me, the handwriting was Ned’s.

“Be calm, my dear,” I said, my heart beating violently; “it is only a chance resemblance.”

“It is not,” she cried. “My Ned, my dear Ned, wrote this name! O, is it possible, is it possible?”

She pressed the letter to her breast, and broke into a flood of tears.

“Shall I open it, dear?” I said.

“No one but I must open it,” she replied, controlling her agitation. “See, see! It is an Australian letter, and it is in Ned’s writing. Give me strength—give me strength!”

I knew the wild hope that was throbbing in her brain; it was throbbing in my own. Presently she sank to her knees, and laying her head upon her chair, prayed in silence: I prayed, too, and waited.

She rose, still trembling, but calmer and stronger, and slowly opened the envelope. As her eyes fell upon the first few words, she sobbed.

“Let me feel your arms about me, Miss Felicia! Tell me I am not dreaming, or I shall go mad!”

I pressed her to my heart, I whispered soothing assurances to her, I implored her to summon all her fortitude. My efforts were successful.

“Dear friend,” she sobbed, “sweet friend! What should I do without you!”

With what infinite gratitude did we peruse the letter which was, indeed, a voice from the grave. For our dear Ned was living, having been wonderfully spared to tell his own tale, to vindicate his honor which had been so foully besmeared. It was wonderful, wonderful! And in this little room, saddened by sad memories, hope and joy reigned once more.

“MY DEAR GRACE,” the letter ran, “I can imagine the feelings which will agitate you when you receive this letter which God, in His mercy, has permitted me to live to write. Not for all the riches in the world would I allow the earliest mail to leave these shores without a letter from me to you. I can scarcely control my impatience; I shall count the days, the hours, till it reaches your dear hands.

“Grace, dear, our ship was indeed lost, but I and five others were saved. I will not grieve your tender heart by relating our sufferings. They are over, and one day the great blessing may be mine of seeing you again, and telling you all which the brief time at my disposal (for the mail closes in two hours) will not allow me now to narrate.

“Briefly, dear, the story of our peril and our escape

is this. We encountered a terrible, a frightful storm, and for three days and nights our ship was tossed and battered about till masts, bulwarks, decks were torn from it and cast into the wild seas. In that time a great number of passengers and sailors were washed overboard, and those that remained could do nothing but wait for death. Early in the storm we lost our boats, but had we not, and had we put to sea in them while the storm was raging, it is not possible they could have lived, crowded as they must have been with despairing mortals. At length came the final moment. The ship went down, and we with it; but rising to the surface, my hands clutched a spar which slipped from my grasp. But contact with this spar inspired me with a faint hope. The sea was strewn with broken pieces of the wreck, and the fact of my being a good swimmer was the cause of my rescue. To one of these pieces of wreck a dozen men and women were clinging, and I managed to get upon it. I do not know for how long we were beaten about on this frail means of succor; it seemed to us to be weeks, but that could not have been, for we were without food, and could not have lived so long. I think, however, it must have been for sixty or seventy hours, at the end of which time only six of us were left. Then we were cast upon some rocks in the South Pacific, and in a most distressful condition, crawled to land. We were upon an island, and we the only human beings on it. During and before the storm "The Silver Queen" had been driven out of its proper course, and we did not know where we were. Grace, dear, we lived upon this island for over three years without seeing a ship. We neglected no means to attract a passing vessel, and we had almost given up hope when a ship that had also been driven out of its course, saw our signals and took

us on board. That is the story, related as briefly as possible, and the one morsel of comfort that animates me now as I write is that the news of our rescue, doubtless with the names of the few who were saved, has been cabled to the London newspapers and published in them, so that, long before you can receive this letter, you will have known that I was one of the number. Of my dear father's joy I need not speak, and *my* joy at seeing him well and strong you may imagine.

“And now, dear Grace, I come to the subject which has caused so much grief, so much injustice. It is incumbent on me to clear my good name.

“My father has shown me all the letters he has received from Miss Felicia, from you, and from your father; and he has described to me what he wrote in his letters to you all. Thus I know exactly what has transpired. For your faith in me, for your dear letters to my father, I thank you, Grace. Heaven will reward you, for kind words and deeds are never lost.

“Dear Grace, it is true that your father left in the office for me a letter containing bank notes for two hundred pounds, with instructions what to do with the money. But at the very time I was reading this letter, another was delivered to me from my father in Australia, which made me fear that he was dying, and I resolved to go out to him without the delay of an hour. I made inquiries, and was informed that a ship, ‘The Silver Queen,’ was to sail from Plymouth early the next morning. Had I executed your father's commission, which rendered it necessary that I should go to Guildford, I should have lost the chance of getting to Plymouth in time to obtain a passage in ‘The Silver Queen’ for Australia. I wrote a letter to your father, explaining the circumstances of my sudden departure, and I

enclosed in it his own written instructions to me and the bank notes for the money he wished me to pay away. I sought for him, but unfortunately could not find him ; had I seen him I should have returned the money personally to him, and I wrote my explanatory letter only because experience of his movements had taught me that it was sometimes difficult to come across him without a previous engagement being made. With my letter in my hand I hastened to your house, intending to give it to you, but you and Miss Felicia were from home, and the only member of the family in the house was your grandmamma. I saw her and gave her the letter, begging her to give it to Mr. Longmore the moment she saw him. This is a true statement of what occurred.

“ In thinking over the matter I can come to but one of two conclusions, either that your grandmamma forgot all about the letter, or, deeming it of no importance, put it away with other unimportant things which she has on several occasions appropriated.

“ Dear Grace, when you have read these lines go immediately to your grandmamma and tax her memory. Do not be satisfied with a denial from her. Tell her that I, Edward Ollier, unjustly accused of a crime and unjustly condemned, charge her with concealing that upon which the honor of my good name rests. You will best know how to force a confession from her. In your dear hands I place my defence. I leave my vindication to you.

“ And now I must close this letter ; I have barely time to catch the mail. Good-bye, dear Grace. I am as I have ever been ; my heart is unchanged. There is nothing to prevent my saying this, nothing that can in justice stop me from declaring that I love you truly and

faithfully. Give my love to Miss Felicia, to which my dear father adds his, to her and to you.

“Yours till death,

“NED OLLIER.”

The letter read, Grace kissed it, and said :

“I am going to my father. You witnessed the accusation ; you must witness the acquittal.”

We proceeded to his study, and busily engaged as he was he made no remonstrance at the interruption. Ever since he had branded Ned as a thief there had been between him and his daughter none of those outward demonstrations of affection which sweeten the association of parents and children ; and, as if by common consent, the smallest matter which might have provoked contention was avoided. I have an impression that, from the day of the accusation and of his daughter's spirited defence of her lover, Benjamin Longmore was in some sense afraid of Grace, and I have little doubt that this fear sprang from the prickings of his conscience.

He looked up at our entrance, and cleared some papers from a chair for Grace, who was too deeply absorbed in her purpose to seat herself.

“When I gave you your letters, father,” she commenced, “I found that one had dropped to the ground, and was left behind.”

He stretched forth his hand for it.

“The letter was for me,” she said. “Here is the envelope. It comes from Australia, you see. Do you recognize the writing?”

He looked at it, and his face grew a shade paler. I had never been more observant of the smallest signs than I was during this interview ; I was seeking for

something which, before the interview was ended, was revealed to me.

"It is Ned's writing," said Grace. "He is living, thank God, having been wonderfully and mercifully saved. It would not be proper, perhaps, for me to receive letters from him without your knowledge, although he has risen, as it were, from the grave, and although there rests upon him no such prohibition as you conveyed to his father."

He exhibited no surprise at her knowledge of this prohibition, nor at the intimation that Ned was living, but I saw that he was disconcerted when she spoke of Ned.

"Has Mr. Ollier written to you," he asked coldly, "since my last letter to him?"

"He has not," replied Grace, "but I have written to him regularly, and Miss Felicia has heard frequently from him. Father, the news of Ned's safety does not seem to surprise you."

He did not reply to this, and shuddering as though she had been struck, she continued:

"I have brought Ned's letter for you to read."

"I have no wish to read it," he said.

"But it is imperative you should," said Grace. "He has entrusted his honor to me, and with your own lips you shall acquit him of the foul charge you brought against him."

"Grace," he cried, "do you forget that I am your father? Do you forget the duty you owe me?"

"No," she said sadly, "I do not forget it; but there is a higher duty before me, and I shall fulfil it."

She held out the letter to him, and he took it and read it. Returning it to her, he said:

"Well?"

“Well, father? Have you nothing to say to it?”

“Nothing,” he replied. “Your grandmother is dead. If what this young man writes is true he is unfortunate, for his defence comes too late. You cannot summon up the dead.”

“It is never too late for justice,” said Grace, “and those who have gone from us have still the power to speak to us, to touch our hearts, even to guide us in the right path, if we will but listen. Grandmamma cannot testify to Ned’s innocence, but evidence of it may be found in her boxes.”

“Well,” said Benjamin Longmore, “go and search them.”

“Not alone,” said Grace. “You must come with us.”

“If it must be,” he said, shrugging his shoulders, and we three went together upstairs to the room which Grandmamma Longmore had occupied.

Everything had been put in order under my directions. The grand dresses she had lately worn were in the wardrobe, the valuable rings with which she had decorated her wasted fingers were in a jewel-case on the dressing-table. I pointed them out to Benjamin Longmore, and said he ought to take care of them; the only notice he took of my advice was a careless nod. Absorbed as he was in the pursuit of wealth, there was absent in him that meanness which generally accompanies it.

From under the bed we dragged forward the two hair-covered trunks in which Grandmamma Longmore had kept her treasures. Not knowing what they contained I had placed them there for better safety. We searched for the keys, which Grace gave to her father.

“You must open the trunks,” she said.

He unlocked them, and took from them the articles with which they were filled, and laid them on the bed. Many of the parcels were sealed with wax, others were tied with string, all were in some way secured. One by one we opened them and it was only because of the solemn search in which we were engaged that we were prevented from appreciating the singular comicality of our discoveries. The articles we took from their coverings were absolutely worthless: lumps of sugar, heaven knows how many pounds in all, pins, hairpins, empty reels of cotton and thread, buttons, shoe-laces, patterns of dress pieces which had been sent to the house by enterprising tradesmen, and other substantial advertisements, such as little cakes of patent soaps, starch, blue, cocoa, tooth-powder, etc., etc. Before we came to the end of this strange collection Grace handed to her father a flat packet sealed in a dozen places. Unfastening it he drew forth a letter addressed to himself in Ned's writing. Grace put her hand to her heart.

"Open the letter, father," she said.

He did so, and, like winged messengers from heaven, there fluttered to the bed bank notes for two hundred pounds. He read the letter in silence, took up the notes, looked carefully at them, and put letter and money in his pocket.

"They are new Bank of England notes, father."

"They are."

"You are a man of business. You must have known the numbers."

"I did not know them, but they could be traced."

"They were never traced."

"Never."

"You took means that they should be."

“I did.”

“Are you satisfied of Ned’s innocence? Do you withdraw the accusation?”

“I am satisfied of his innocence. I withdraw the accusation.”

“Ned did not rob you. He is not a thief?”

“He did not rob me. He is not a thief.”

“No,” said Grace, with a glowing face, “he is not a thief. He is the noblest, purest gentleman in all the world!”

She clasped her hands before her eyes, but there were no tears in them. They were radiant, as was he lovely face. Presently she said :

“There are a few words in Ned’s letter, father, which I should like to read aloud.” She referred to the letter, and read: “The one morsel of comfort that animates me now as I write is that the news of our rescue, doubtless with the names of the few who were saved, has been cabled to the London newspapers and published in them, so that long before you can receive this letter, you will have known that I was one of the number.” Father, for some time after the news of the loss of ‘The Silver Queen’ was received, we searched the newspapers in the hope that intelligence might arrive that it was not true. When at length we gave up hope we ceased looking at the papers, and from that time have never read them. I will not ask you whether you knew of Ned’s safety—I dare not, father.”

She paused, dreading, hoping that he would speak, but he uttered no word. I glanced at his face, and saw there that he had read of Ned’s rescue, and had kept it from us. What I had been seeking during the interview was now revealed to me.

“Dear Miss Felicia,” said Grace, “I am going to my

room. No, do not come with me. I do not require support ; I am well, I am strong. There is light in my heart. I must offer up to God, alone, my prayer of gratitude ! ”

It is necessary, perhaps that I should explain why Mr. Macmillan, with whom we were in constant communication, did not inform us of Ned's rescue. The fact was, although he knew that Grace had passed through a period of sorrow, he knew nothing whatever of its cause. Neither Grace nor I had ever acquainted him that the man she loved was on “The Silver Queen.” He had never seen or heard of Philip Olier or his son, and there was no reason, therefore, why he should speak to us of one special item in the columns of the newspapers which, in these times, record from day to day so many strange and startling events.

CHAPTER XIX.

I HOLD YOU BOTH TO THE PROMISE YOU GAVE ME.

SOME few months after Ned's innocence was established Grace read me a passage from one of his letters in which he desired her not to write to him again to Australia. He and his father were coming home. He spoke vaguely of a stroke of good fortune which enabled them to return to their native land, but he did not enter into particulars. All he said was, that they were not coming home penniless.

“I shall see my Ned soon,” said Grace in a blithe voice.

For myself I scarcely knew how to take the news. Both Ned and Grace had given a promise to Benjamin

Longmore that they would not marry without his consent and I felt that this consent would be withheld. In that case, what would the faithful lovers do? I could not decide. All that could be done was to wait for events. Grace was very bright and happy, and I did not speak to her of my forebodings. The dear girl had had sorrow enough.

In due time a letter arrived, in Ned's writing, and with an English stamp on the envelope :

“MY DEAR GRACE,—We are home, my dear father and I. Dare I hope to see you—and how? I must not come to your father's house without his consent.

“Yours ever faithfully,
“NED.”

“I will write to Ned to-night,” said Grace, “that you and I will come and see him to-morrow. The address he gives is not far from Mr. Macmillan's house.”

I did not like the look of this ; Mr. Macmillan lived in an unfashionable neighborhood, and that the Olliers should take up their residence there, even temporarily, seemed to augur that they were not overburdened with money. On the following day we went to them. Benjamin Longmore placed no restraint upon his daughter's movements, and thereby showed that he had not only respect for her character but the fullest confidence in her pledged word.

Grace's heart was very full, and we had but little conversation on the road. The moment we turned the corner of the street in which the Olliers lodged she saw Ned, who was waiting at the door, looking out for us. He hastened towards us.

“Grace ! ” he cried.

“Ned!”

They gazed at each other earnestly, lovingly, their hands clasped tight. That was all. But the long and earnest look brought happiness to both. Then Philip Ollier, who had kept a little in the background, came forward. He put his arm around Grace, and kissed her in the open street; and moreover both he and Ned kissed me with much affection. There was no harm in it; I was an old woman. Between Grace and Ned no kisses passed.

How brown, and manly, and strong Ned looked! And his father looked well, too. There was no longer trouble in his face, and as his proud eyes rested upon Ned I knew where his joy and happiness lay.

We walked along to Mr. Macmillan's workshops, Philip Ollier and I leading the way. We had much to talk of, and Philip Ollier spoke of Benjamin Longmore.

“He has grown very rich,” he said.

“Very rich,” I said.

“He has attained his wish,” said Philip Ollier. “He always sighed for riches.” He glanced over his shoulder at Grace and Ned, who, engaged in earnest conversation, were following behind. “Is there any hope?”

“I cannot say,” I answered. “Mr. Longmore, as you knew him once in the old happy times, and Mr. Longmore, as he is to-day, are different men.”

“Ned can provide a comfortable home for Grace, Miss Felicia.” I sighed and he added. “Well, we are not going to despond.”

“A fatal promise stands between them, Mr. Ollier.”

“Ah, you take the gloomiest view; but there is a bright side to the shield.”

“Will they keep to their promise?” I asked.

"I think there is no doubt of it." I sighed again. "Come, come, we must have no shadow. The world is filled with light." He spoke so brightly that my sadness vanished. "They are young still. As Grace turned the corner of the street I thought it was her mother coming towards us."

"She is worthy of her mother Mr. Ollier. She has the sweetest nature, the most noble heart."

"I know it. I love and honor her."

We arrived at Mr. Macmillan's workshops, and waiting for Grace and Ned to join us, entered. Mr. Macmillan came and welcomed us. Philip Ollier and Ned were much interested in what he had to say, and when he turned to Grace with the remark, "you cannot imagine how much we owe her," Ned's eyes lighted up with joy. Mr. Macmillan saw how it was with them, and he gazed at them approvingly. A little later Philip Ollier said :

"I think we can help you, Mr. Macmillan. You must enroll us."

"It is done," said Mr. Macmillan. "We are grateful for the smallest assistance."

The hour we passed in the workshops was a very happy one, and I saw Phillip Ollier give Mr. Macmillan some money. The father and son walked part of the way home with us, then we bade them good-bye.

"Ned is going to write to father this week," said Grace.

"Did he speak of the promise that was given to your father?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied "and, we shall abide by it."

Upon our arrival at our house we were told that Mr. Longmore was in his study and wished to see us at once.

"Ah, here you are," he said; "I have been waiting for you. I am going to show you something very wonderful. You saw the carriage at the door. In five minutes we must be off."

"Where to father?" asked Grace.

"You shall see. It is a surprise I have in store for you. Run away, and come down in five minutes."

"I have something to tell you first," said Grace.

"Never mind; it can wait. Go and get ready."

"I must tell you now. I have seen Ned and his father."

"Oh," he said, "they have come home, then. They had better have stopped where they were."

"Why, father?"

"Why!" he echoed. "They were in Australia, weren't they? Australia, the land of gold. They might have picked up something worth coming across if they had remained. There are golden chances there as well as in this country, for a man whose head is screwed on right. Look here." He took a newspaper from the table. "When we come home from our drive read this account of the wonderful reef that is discovered there, and made into a company. It was floated in a day, the capital, one million. Think of it. A million! And the shares are at a fabulous premium. Every fifty pounds is worth two hundred. The dividends are declared not yearly or half yearly, but weekly. It is enough to send a man crazy to read about it. It isn't gold in quartz, it's quartz in gold. A hundred ounces to the ton. Now if Mr. Ollier and his son had stopped in the land of gold, they might have had just such another piece of luck. The race is to the swift and strong."

A singular smile appeared on his lips. "The race. Ah, Mr. Ollier and I, when we were boys"—he pulled

himself up suddenly at this unconscious recalling of the dear old song—"Well, yes, we entered for a race. You shall see who will win." He spoke no word of disapproval at our having been to see the Olliers, but with a light of triumph in his eyes, added exultingly, "Yes, you shall see who will win. It has come at last, at last."

"I do not understand you, father," said Grace.

"You will understand soon; but you are wasting time."

"We are quite ready."

"Come along, then."

We left the house and entered the carriage, and he gave instructions to the coachman, bidding him drive fast. After we had proceeded three or four miles he said:

"Do you remember the road, Miss Felicia?"

"Yes, sir," I replied, "it is the road we took many, many years ago, when your dear wife was alive. Mr. Ollier and his son were with us."

Not a single circumstance in connection with my beloved mistress had escaped my memory. Whenever I visited spots which had been hallowed by her presence, I seemed to live over again the days that were past.

"Yes," said Benjamin Longmore, "they were with us. You remember the story that was told, Miss Felicia?"

"At the gates of the beautiful house, sir, Mon Repos? Yes, I remember it well."

"Was I there?" asked Grace.

"No, dear," I said; "you were too young."

"The story was not finished then," observed Benjamin Longmore. "It soon will be."

We dashed along, the horses' hoofs ringing merrily on the hard road. What was my astonishment when

the coachman pulled up at the gates of Mon Repos?

"We get out here," said Benjamin Longmore. "Look there."

I looked in the desired direction, and saw bills pasted up, announcing the sale of Mon Repos in consequence of the death of the owner.

"I said one day I should be rich. I am rich. I said one day I should be master of Mon Repos. I shall be."

The gates being opened for us we strolled through the grounds, and afterwards inspected the house itself. It had been furnished with exquisite taste. There was nothing tawdry about it. Elegant simplicity distinguished every room. It was not as large as I expected it to be, but that rather added to its beauty in my eyes. That nothing had been spared to render it not only beautiful but comfortable was evident. The grounds were as perfect as the dwelling. There was a lovely lawn; there were orchards, nut walks, kitchen and flower gardens, a dairy—everything, in fact, that the heart could desire.

"It is to be sold by auction in a fortnight," said Benjamin Longmore, "house and furniture in one lot, if the reserve price is bid. I shall buy it, and my dreams will be realized."

We made no comment; beautiful as was Mon Repos there were matters much nearer our hearts, even such a simple thing as a letter which Ned was to write to Benjamin Longmore.

By the post which brought this letter to the house Grace received from Ned a copy of it. It was manly and respectful. Ned did not beat about the bush by recounting his sufferings and adventures; he introduced the subject earnestly and tenderly, and having stated that he was in a position to provide a fitting home for

Grace, such a home as he was sure her father would approve of, he concluded by asking to be permitted to pay his addresses to her, with a view to an early marriage.

We read this letter with hope, its tone was so exactly in accordance with our wishes. Anxiously did we wait for some sign from Benjamin Longmore; but day after day passed, and he gave us none. Then Grace resolved to speak to her father.

“You have heard from Ned, father?”

“Ah, you know that he wrote to me?”

“Yes, father. It was arranged between us that he should do so.”

“What do you want to ascertain from me?”

“Whether you have replied to Ned’s letter.”

“I replied to it to-day, declining to give my consent.”

Grace turned very white, but the color soon came to her face again.

“What is your reason, father?”

“I gave none. I will give none. I hold you both to the promise, the sacred promise, you gave me, that you would not marry without my consent.”

“It was scarcely a sacred promise, father, but it is binding upon us. You can prevent my marrying Ned, but you cannot prevent my loving him.”

“You will think better of that by-and-bye.”

“Never, father. While I live I shall love him, and no other man. If I marry I will marry him, and no other man.”

“You speak somewhat boldly.”

“I speak the dictates of my heart, in which I hold Ned with a love that will never fade, that will never grow less. Father, my happiness is at stake. You will reconsider your decision?”

"I will not. Understand me, Grace. If Mr. Ollier had such a home as Mon Repos to offer you, with means to support it, I might consent to reconsider the matter; not otherwise. Even then I do not say I would consent, but that I would reconsider my answer. With my sanction you shall marry none but a man as rich as myself.

"It is scarcely likely," said Grace, in a sad tone, "that Ned can offer me such a home, and you have no right to expect it. I should be happy with him anywhere, under any circumstances. You are not acting fairly by us. He is your equal, in every way."

"My equal! You are mad!"

"I am truly in earnest. There was a time when you would not have disputed it. Father, think. Money is not everything. It can degrade as well as ennoble."

"Ah," said Benjamin Longmore, "you speak as those beggars the Olliers speak, and this is their teaching."

"You are mistaken, father. They are my own sentiments, and neither Ned nor his father has said a word on the subject."

"Whichever way it is," said Benjamin Longmore, "I have heard enough. Grace, do not lose sight of your duty to me."

"I will not, but I owe a duty to myself and to others as well as to you."

"I speak of a child's duty to her father. You may force me to command you not to see the Olliers again."

"Do not do that. I should not obey you. Do not drive me too hard, father."

Upon that, my dear Grace left the room.

I was not present at this interview, but I heard all its

particulars from Grace, and am therefore enabled to give a faithful account of what took place. Benjamin Longmore did not forbid his daughter to see the Olliers, and we met them every other day. Ned was very downcast, of course, but Grace's sweet ways comforted him a little.

"We must wait, dear," she said. "My father will relent in time; I feel that he will."

But our principal comforter was Philip Ollier. He insisted that all would come right, and his cheerfulness and confidence put heart into us. I gave him an account of our visit to Mon Repos, and he smiled and said:

"See how riches may turn one's head, Miss Felicia. A dozen years ago nothing could have shaken my faith in Benjamin Longmore. The glare of gold has been too much for him. Well, time will show, time will show."

CHAPTER XV.

A FORTNIGHT OF EXCITEMENT.

THE fortnight between the day of our visit to Mon Repos and that on which it was to be sold by auction was an unusually busy time with Benjamin Longmore, both at home and in his city offices. During all these heart troubles his conduct towards me had been wonderfully consistent. He knew that I took sides with Grace against him, and that I aided and abetted her in doing that of which he disapproved, such as visiting the Olliers and meeting Ned regularly. He knew that whenever these domestic matters cropped up I expressed my opinions frankly and freely, and that

they were always adverse to his own. And yet, although he was my master, he never hinted at dismissing me from his service. He paid the most scrupulous regard to his wife's last wishes as to my position with Grace and in his house ; and antagonistic as we were, and much as I disapproved of his proceedings, I could not but yield him respect for this faithful obedience to one who, if she had lived, would have been as a shield against evil, and would have kept him from back-sliding.

The painful crisis to which matters had come did not prevent him from calling upon my services during the fortnight, the pregnant events of which I am now recording. He summoned me indeed every day, and kept me busy in his private office with figures and calculations and comparisons, and as he had a great many callers while I was with him I was a witness of much that opened my eyes to what was going on. In the course of this fortnight he had an extraordinary number of visitors, who all came upon business and who were all in a tremendous hurry. Day by day the excitement grew until my head was in a perfect whirl, and it was only the stirring nature of the disclosures which were made in my presence that enabled me to keep my senses together, for I saw that something serious was impending.

On the first day Benjamin Longmore said to me, in explanation of his intention to remain at home a while longer than usual during business hours :

“ I intend in the next fortnight, Miss Felicia, to make enough money to pay for Mon Repos out and out. I have had a private hint that the reserve put upon the whole of the property as it stands is eighty thousand pounds. It is a large sum, but much of the furniture

is very valuable, and you will see by this catalogue, which you can look over at your leisure, that the house is filled with rare china and bric-a-brac, and that there are a number of famous pictures in it. Now I shall make this eighty thousand pounds before the sale takes place, perhaps more, and to do this by a grand coup of my devising it is necessary that I should be seen very little on the Exchange. But my agents are working for me."

I do not pretend to be able to make this grand coup clear to those who are reading my story, first because it was very complicated, and second because it presently became mixed up with other grand coups which rendered it still more confusing to me. I could work out the figures and calculations which Benjamin Longmore set before me, and that was all that was required of me.

At the end of the first day, after he had dismissed his agents, Benjamin Longmore rubbed his hands gleefully, and informed me that a grand commencement had been made.

"If I realized what I have done to-day," he said, "I should add ten thousand pounds to my banking account."

It was a marvel to me how great sums of money could be so easily made without any of it passing from hand to hand.

Fortunately my master did not summon me to his room till two o'clock of the day, so that our mornings were free, and it was in the morning that Grace and I were in the habit of seeing Ned and his father.

On the sixth or seventh day something that one of his agents said to Benjamin Longmore sent him into a fit of laughter.

"There is nothing to look glum about," he said.

“The stock has gone down all of a sudden. Let me see. It is two and a half worse than it opened at this morning. Well, buy up to a quarter of a million. Run off at once.”

The agents' cabs, with the smartest horses that could be selected, were always waiting at the door, and during these exciting days used to dash up and tear away like mad.

“If it continues to go down,” said the agent, “what then?”

“What then?” exclaimed Benjamin Longmore. “Why continue to buy. How do you think I have made my money? By being chicken-hearted?”

Away flew the agent to carry out my master's instructions, and came back in the evening with a graver face. He reported that the stock still continued to go down, and that there was a loss of twelve thousand pounds on the day's transactions.

“We shall realize all the more,” said Benjamin Longmore, “when it goes up again—as it must. When was I mistaken? To-morrow morning, the first thing, continue to buy all that is offered. We will keep it in one hand.”

On the morrow, after Benjamin Longmore's return home, the telegraph boys kept up one continued rat-tat, rat-tat with their messages, and what with these and his numerous callers he had enough to do; but he did everything promptly, giving his orders with decision, and I understood how it was that he had hitherto been so successful. I remembered him saying once, a good many years ago, that he had the mastiff quality in him; he was now displaying it.

On this evening he branched out, speculating in other directions, but the markets continued to go against him.

When he sold stock it went up, when he bought it went down, and as his operations were colossal the balance on the wrong side swelled enormously. I heard him walking up and down his bedroom in the night, and upon my seeing him the following day I was shocked at his wild and haggard face. If I had had the slightest hope that my advice would have been of assistance I should have advised him to stop, but I knew too well that he would have resented the smallest interference from me.

Every night now he paced the bedroom, or crept down to his private office to pore over figures, instead of going to sleep, but I doubt whether sleep would have come to him if he had courted it, he was in that state of excitement.

"To-morrow the estate will be sold," he said. "I intend to purchase it, to become master of Mon Repos before I die."

"You should try to sleep, sir," I said.

"Sleep!" he muttered. "I don't think I shall ever sleep again! And if Mon Repos slips through my fingers——"

Nevertheless, racked and tortured as he was, he gave to his agents that evening instructions that staggered them.

"What are you staring and mumbling at?" he exclaimed. "I know what I am about. Carry out my instructions to the letter. It is in this way men become millionaires. I shall get back every shilling of my losses three times over. If I forget to tell you in the morning, I shall be at the Mart from twelve o'clock to one. I am going to buy Mon Repos."

The agent stared at him, and hurried off.

Benjamin Longmore's check book had been in fre-

quent requisition these last few days, and he had signed for sums of enormous amount. He walked up and down the room, clutching his hair, twining and untwining his fingers, and muttering to himself. Grace knew of the condition of her father, and had sent a private note to the doctor, asking him to call at the house in a friendly way to see Benjamin Longmore, and to say nothing of her having written to him. The doctor dropped in, and shook hands with my master with assumed carelessness, and then, as if it had suddenly occurred to him, said :

“It strikes me, Mr. Longmore, that you look worn.”

“I dare say,” said Benjamin Longmore, “I have a great deal on my mind. I am going to buy a fine estate to-morrow, and it will cost a great deal of money, a great deal of money, a great deal of money. But I mean to buy it, I mean to buy it.”

“Of course, of course. Now I am going to take the liberty of an old friend, not of a doctor, you know, and I shall send you a sedative.”

“You may send it if you like,” said Benjamin Longmore, “but I promise you it will not be taken. I see how it is. You are in league against me.”

“Nonsense, nonsense.”

“You are. You will give me a sedative that will send me to sleep till Mon Repos is sold. You are kind, doctor, but the trick has failed. Don’t trouble yourself, my friend.”

He glared at the doctor, who laughed and shrugged his shoulders, and after a little further conversation bade my master good-night.

I succeeded in getting a few words with him before he left the house.

“Mr. Longmore is in a bad way,” he said. “If this

continues he will have brain fever. By the way, some rumors have reached me that he is pretty nigh ruined."

He did not ask me if the rumors were true, but I told him that Benjamin Longmore was greatly worried by some speculations which had not turned out well. He nodded his head, and said :

"I shall risk offending him, and shall call in the morning to see him."

He was as good as his word, and he made his appearance while we were breakfasting. I say "breakfasting," but neither Grace nor I ate much ; Benjamin Longmore ate nothing. He had passed a dreadful night, and had not taken off his clothes. Before the doctor called he said :

"I am not going to my office this morning, Miss Felicia. I shall go straight from here to the Mart. Send off these telegrams immediately."

They were to his agents, and contained fresh instructions. His reception of the doctor was not friendly.

"You have eaten no breakfast, I see," said the doctor. "That is a bad commencement of the day."

"I can't eat," muttered Benjamin Longmore. "Food chokes me."

"Take a glass of champagne," said the doctor. "That, at least is a medicine you will not object to."

Benjamin Longmore consented readily enough to this, and he drank two glasses of champagne, watching warily that the doctor dropped nothing into the glass.

"And now," said the doctor, "let me advise you strongly to allow Miss Felicia to accompany you when you go out this morning."

"I will think of it," said my master.

At eleven o'clock he told me that I might go with him if I liked, saying that it would please me perhaps

to see him purchase the estate upon which he had set his heart. I was soon ready, and we rode together to the city.

In the Mart in which the auction was to take place messengers were awaiting him with written slips of paper. As he glanced at them his face turned deathly white, and he trembled like a man struck with palsy. Writing answers to the information he had received he dispatched the messengers, and we applied ourselves to what the auctioneer, who was already in his box, was saying. There were other properties to be sold before Mon Repos, and this part of the day's business being disposed of, the auctioneer said: "I have now to offer, gentlemen, the most charming and lovely estate in the suburbs of London."

He went on to describe it, and said that, in accordance with the will of the late owner, Mon Repos, a freehold of twenty acres, situated in a locality in which the value of the land was daily rising, with all its improvements and furnishings, of which complete details were given in the catalogues, was to be put up in a single lot. If the reserve price was reached it would be sold; if not it would be disposed of piecemeal on a future day. He then asked for a bid for the property.

I looked at Benjamin Longmore, who, in a husky voice called out:

"Fifty thousand."

"Fifty thousand is bid," said the auctioneer. "Fifty thousand, fifty thousand. Fifty-two thousand, fifty-four, fifty-six, fifty-eight, sixty thousand. I may state that this is a long way from the reserve. Sixty-five thousand. Thank you."

"Seventy thousand," said Benjamin Longmore.

“Seventy thousand, seventy-five thousand, seventy-six, seventy-seven, seventy-eight, seventy-eight, seventy eight. We have not reached the mark yet, gentlemen.”

“Eighty thousand,” said Benjamin Longmore.

“Eighty thousand, eighty thousand, eighty thousand. Eighty-one thousand. Thank you.”

At the moment the auctioneer was dwelling on this last bid, and Benjamin Longmore was about to open his lips to bid again, he was touched on the shoulder. Turning, he saw an agent who had visited the house of late very frequently. He whispered something in Benjamin Longmore’s ear.

“My God!” muttered my master, and his hands wandered in front of him, for support.

“Eighty-one thousand, eighty-one thousand, eighty-one thousand,” said the auctioneer. “If there is no further bid this magnificent property will be knocked down for eighty-one thousand pounds. Eighty-one, eighty-one. Going, going——”

Benjamin Longmore essayed to speak, but no sound issued from his lips. The agent clutched my master’s arm, and shook his head warningly. Again my master tried to speak, but could not. The muscles of his face twitched convulsively, and I saw that he was in frightful agony.

“It is going, gentlemen,” said the auctioneer. “It will be years before such another opportunity presents itself. It is the chance of a lifetime. Going for eighty-one thousand pounds. Going, going, going. Gone!” The hammer dropped. Mon Repos was sold, and Benjamin Longmore was not its master.

With a muffled cry he staggered and fell to the ground.

CHAPTER XXI.

AND ALL THE BIRDS WERE SINGING.

A MONTH after Mon Repos was sold the doctor, Grace, and I were standing in the sitting-room of our house.

"He will pull through," said the doctor. "I could not conscientiously give you so decided a hope before this morning, but the tide has turned, and your father will now pull through. It has been a hard tussle, and but for you, my dear ladies, he would have lost the battle. Mr. Longmore owes his life to your care and attention. That is good news, is it not? He will soon be quite well. And you, my dear"—he touched Grace's cheek lightly with his finger—"must get your roses back again. Miss Felicia, there is a young gentleman walking up and down the opposite side of the road. I have observed him indulging in that amusement on other occasions, and the strange feature of the affair is that he keeps continually looking at the windows of this house." The good doctor smiled as he made this comment. "Come to the window. There is the culprit."

It was Ned, who, when he saw us at the window, nodded and smiled anxiously.

"Bless me!" said the doctor. "The roses are coming back much quicker than I could have anticipated. Well, good-morning, good morning."

We went with him to the street door, and Ned came over to us.

"It is good news, dear Grace," he said.

"It is good news, dear Ned," said Grace. "My father is out of danger. I thank God."

They stood at the door, talking for a few minutes, and then Ned took his departure.

Benjamin Longmore, since the sale of *Mon Repos*, had indeed been near to death, and I verily believe if it had not been for dear Grace's unremitting care, that he would have died. Another misfortune had befallen him. He was utterly ruined. Of his great fortune not a shilling was saved. The mad speculation of that fatal fortnight had stripped him bare.

There was even something more. Had it not been for the intervention of an unknown friend dishonor would have attended his ruin, for in the settlement of his accounts a large sum was needed to set them straight. Unknown to him, unknown to us, this friend had stepped in to preserve his good name, and although he stood a beggar in the eyes of the world, not a word could be uttered against him. He had grown very old looking during his illness, and his hair was almost white.

As the doctor predicted, he soon got well. From the day on which he was pronounced out of danger he mended rapidly. And now, after the lapse of another two weeks, he was sitting with us, listening to Grace's gentle voice, and gazing at her in a kind of wonder. Ever and anon he turned his thoughts inwards, as it were, questioning himself.

"Grace, dear," he said.

"Yes, father."

"Come close to me, child. Can you forgive me?"

She kissed his tears away. "It is over, dear father. We will forget the past few years. We will look for-

ward to the future, with hope, with love." She repeated the words. "With hope, with love."

And now it was she who was crying. He held her in his embrace, and presently released her, and she went back to her place, and took up the work upon which she was engaged. Calling to me he said that he wished me to write to a gentleman who had managed his business for him, asking him to call in the morning. I wrote the letter at his dictation, and he signed it ; and on the following morning his late manager called.

"Do not go away, Miss Felicia," said Benjamin Longmore.

I resumed my seat, and the two gentlemen had a long conversation, in the course of which my master learned all that had taken place.

"I am a ruined man, Miss Felicia," he said.

"We knew that, sir," I said, "but it made no difference."

Had I expressed myself truly I should have said I was glad of it. The money he had amassed had brought sorrow with it, and now that he had lost it here was a chance of happiness for us.

"Who has paid the expenses of the house during my illness, Miss Felicia?" he asked.

"Grace, sir. She has a little money of her own, you know."

"I am glad she took it from me," he said, "or it might have been lost in the wreck."

He then went into closer details with his late manager, and learned that his accounts had been over twenty thousand pounds short.

"The amount was paid by a gentleman," said the manager, "who desired that his name should not be introduced into the matter. But it is right you should know it."

"It is. Who was this good friend?"

"Mr. Philip Ollier."

I started, and looked up. Ned had not mentioned one word of this.

"I am justly reproved," said Benjamin Longmore, and when the gentleman was gone he asked me to bring Grace to him.

"Philip Ollier has saved my good name, Grace," he said.

"It is like him," she replied. "It was my good name as well as yours."

"Has he been here, Grace?"

"No, father. Ned has been outside, anxious for news. That is all. He did not come in. I have a note for you from Mr. Ollier. May I give it to you?"

"I shall be glad to have it, Grace."

She handed it to him. It was short and simple :

"DEAR BEN :—May Ned and I come to see you? Your old and faithful friend, PHILIP OLLIER."

Benjamin Longmore was silent for a few moments, then he said :

"Bring me pen and ink, dear."

She put writing materials before him, and he wrote :

"DEAR PHIL :—If your heart is not filled with bitterness towards me, come, and bring Ned with you. I am awakened out of a horrible dream. I hardly dare to call myself your old friend, BENJAMIN LONGMORE."

He gave the letter to Grace to read. Her eyes became bright ; there was a joyful ring in her voice.

"I will send it at once, father."

"Take it to him," said Benjamin Longmore, "and

bring him and Ned back with you, if they will come. Miss Felicia will remain with me."

"She danced out of the room, and danced back again, dressed for a happy walk, almost before we could turn round. She embraced her father and me, and flew out of the house like a bird in sweet spring-time.

When she returned with Philip Ollier and Ned, Benjamin Longmore looked humbly and imploringly at them.

"Not a word, old friend," said Philip Ollier, taking his hand, and patting him on the shoulder. "We all make mistakes sometimes. Let us be thankful if we are spared to repair them."

Benjamin Longmore called Grace and Ned to him, and joined their hands.

"But she is a poor girl, Ned," he said.

"She is Grace," said Ned, kissing her.

* * * * *

During the evening Benjamin Longmore asked Philip Ollier how he had made his money.

"You have heard of the Eureka mine, Ben," said Philip Ollier.

It was the wonderful mine of which Benjamin Longmore had spoken to me when he said it was a pity the Olliers had not remained in Australia.

"Who has not heard of it?" said Benjamin Longmore. "It is one of the richest gold mines in the world."

"Ned and I discovered that mine," said Philip Ollier, quietly. "We are the largest shareholders."

* * * * *

On a bright morning Philip Ollier and Ned came in a carriage to take us for a drive. We travelled the old

road, Barnet way, and the carriage stopped at the gates of Mon Repos.

“Our boyish dream, Ben,” said Philip Ollier, with a smile.

“Yes, Phil,” said Benjamin Longmore, with a touch of sadness in his voice.

Philip Ollier jumped down and rang the bell. The gates were opened, and, wrapt in wonder, we walked into the lovely grounds.

“Dear Grace,” said Philip Ollier, “sweet Grace, for the blessing of whose love my boy Ned and I are eternally grateful, this is my wedding present to you. I bought Mon Repos. My dear, it is yours.”

The fragrant air whispered to the trees and all the birds were singing.

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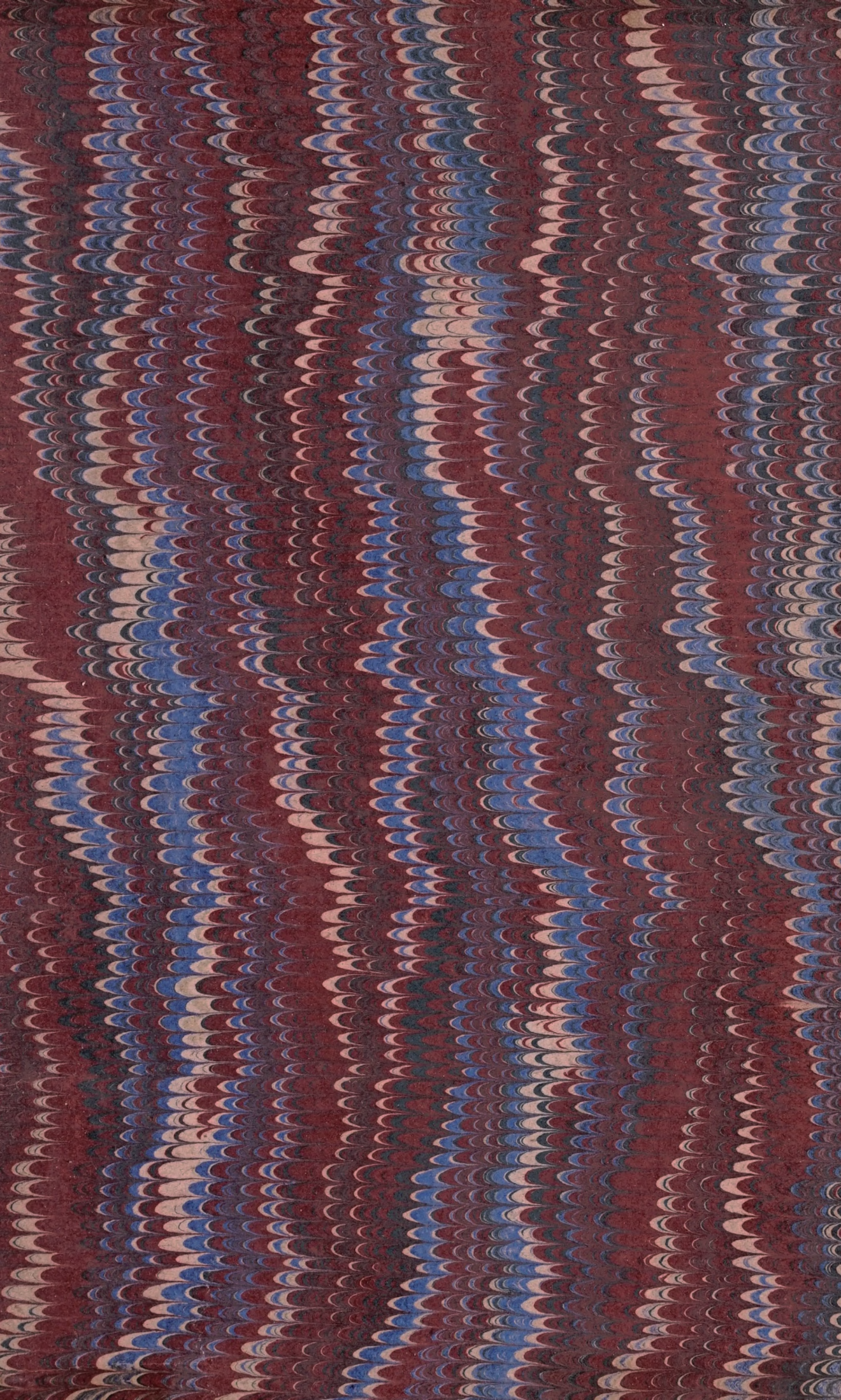
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